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Stannard

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IN LUCK'S WAY

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Stannard, Henrietta Eliza Vaughan
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BY

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IN LUCK'S WAY

CHAPTER I.

"YOU BAD BAD BOY."

It was a cold, dreary, foggy February day, the pavements were greasy, the roadways dangerously slippery, and out of the yellow fog the tall houses of a West-end square loomed like mountains and looked strangely weird and unfamiliar even to the eyes which knew them best, while the few figures passing to and fro seemed like phantoms in the dazzling, deceptive light.

Out of one of the houses in the square a tall and slim young girl came, stepping cautiously along the broad pavement as if she expected that she might slip and fall at any moment. It was hard to say what she

was like beyond being tall and slim, dressed in dark clothing and kept warm by a good quantity of thick furs. But she walked well in spite of her carefulness, and the knot of hair which was visible between her high collar and the brim of her hat, was of a reddish shade and was very abundant.

She went along two sides of the square and was about to turn to the right when her attention was attracted by a boy with a broom, a boy to whom she sometimes gave a penny or two and who had first brought himself to her notice by his ready smile, his quick salute and his pleasant "'Morning, Lady," as she passed to and fro.

He was but a youngster, he looked about twelve years old, though, as is so often the case with London-bred children, he might have been more; he was ill-clad, nay in rags and almost naked, his shirt, his torn knickerbockers — not the real garments which had started in life as knickerbockers, but simply a pair of old trousers torn or worn away at the knee, or rather below the

knee—his tangle of fair hair, nay his very broom all betokened that their young owner was in a state of extreme poverty not to say destitution.

Miss Staunton, wrapped in her warm furs, shivered as she looked at him, but the boy himself did not seem to mind, at least not very much. Indeed he was so engrossed at the moment that Effie Staunton reached the corner that he never heard her light footfall on the grease-muffled pavement or knew that any one was at hand; for as a matter of fact, he was occupied in puffing away with deepest enjoyment at the stump-end of a cigar which some passer-by had thrown away a few moments before.

"Oh! you bad bad boy!" cried Miss Staunton. "Don't you know how awfully bad that is for you? You'll never grow to be a man, you know, if you smoke at your age."

The boy looked up roguishly—"Oh! yes I shall, Lady. I've smoked for the last five years, and I'm always a-growing out of all

my things," and he glanced a down his tattered nether-garments and held out the bit of cigar between his first and second fingers with quite the air of a smart man of fashion, who could afford to smoke cigars all day long if he thought fit to do so.

But Miss Staunton shook her head gravely —"It seems to me," she said—"that you have grown out of those things you've got on now. How come you to be in such a plight as that? I saw you yesterday and you were tidy enough then."

"Not yesterday, Lady," the boy replied —"I wasn't here at all yesterday—the day before it was."

"But you were comfortably enough dressed then"—she persisted.

"Yes, Lady—but I 'ad to part with my things and take to my old ones," he answered.

"And why?"

"Oh! well, I 'ad to," he replied, drumming his poor broken boots hard on the

ground, as if to try and warm them somewhat.

"But won't you tell me?" said the girl gently. "I may be able to help you! Did your father take them away or anything?"

"Ain't got a father," returned the boy still half unwilling, "nor yet a mother—nothin' but a little sister—and she's ill. I 'ad to part with my clothes, I 'ad to do it."

"But what is the matter with her?"

"In—flame—mation!" returned the boy.

"Oh! poor child—and how old is she? Who attends to her?" Miss Staunton cried.

"She's nigh on eight—I attends to her out of working time," he replied—"Eh, Lady, but she 'ave 'ad a near squeak for it this time. Yesterday morning I didn't think she'd last the day through, no, that I didn't! And I 'ad to get some one to look to her a bit, and to keep a fire going all day *and* night and—and—then the doctor he said nought but port-wine 'd save her, port-wine and beef-tea, and I'd spent

all my money so I just took and fastened my clothes."

"Fastened your clothes," the young lady repeated now thoroughly mystified.

"Yes, Lady—I pawned 'em," he explained.

He had a keen sense of humor, that boy, and the laughter at her puzzled face instantly chased out of his roguish eyes the dark shadows which trouble and sickness had brought there.

"Oh! yes—yes. And what about yourself, aren't you just starved to death?" she asked.

"Well, it *is* cold," he admitted—"but there, I shall get used to it after a bit—I shall have to," he added philosophically—"for Nelly's likely to be a long time queer yet, and I'll have to get her the best I can."

For a moment Effie Staunton was silent—then she looked at him suddenly and asked an abrupt question—"What have you had to eat to-day?" she said.

The boy's answer was prompt and unvarnished enough.

"Nothin'," he said simply.

"*Nothing*," she echoed in horror.

"No, Lady—I 'adn't any money left after I'd got what Nelly wanted. But, never mind, I'll 'ave some tea by'm-by—I've done pretty well to-day—two shillin's all but a ha'penny."

"Indeed you shall have some tea," the girl cried warmly. "Come with me—I'll get you something to eat and something to do Nelly good too. Come."

She turned and retraced her steps followed by the boy bearing his broom and looking half-sheepishly about him.

"Lady," he said—"if the peeler sees me he'll be sure I've been a-begging and——"

"Oh, no fear of that—the police won't trouble after you unless I complain to them, and I shall not do that you may be very sure. But tell me how much did you get on your clothes?"

"Three shillin', Lady," he replied.

The girl's heart seemed to turn to water within her, for she was very rich, and it hurt her like a pang of physical pain to think that this boy had been shivering for many hours for want of the value of three shillings, and to think of the sick child lying in a presumably wretched home, ill of inflammation of the lungs and with only three shillings' worth of comfort to coax her back to life and strength again. In truth, Effie Staunton that day felt that it was positively wicked to have too many luxuries in this world.

"We will go right downstairs and talk to cook," she said when they reached the house where she lived; so instead of going up the wide and handsome steps to the front door she passed down the area steps and rang the kitchen bell.

In a moment after the door was opened she had poured out the main lines of the boy's story to the none too sympathetic ears of the middle-aged cook, who was more than half inclined to doubt the lad's

story and altogether inclined to throw cold water on the young lady's charitable instincts.

"How do you know there's a word of truth in it, Miss Effie?" she demanded.

"Give him a good meal and see if he's hungry," Effie retorted promptly.

"Well, there's plenty of sense in that plan," sniffed the older woman. "What's your name, my lad?"

"Ted Brown, mum. Leastways, my right name's Edward Brown, but I never gets called aught but Ted," he replied.

"Are you hungry?"

He glanced at the big pot from which a most delicious and appetizing odor was rising, and his eyes fairly twinkled as he answered. "Lor, missis," he said, "I could eat *you*, if you was cooked."

"Well, I don't want to be eaten just yet," remarked the cook as Effie laughed outright —"neither by you nor anyone else. If you're hungry I'll give you a good stomachfull, but if there's one thing I can't abide,

it's them folks that come round and get a good basketful of broken meat and then throw it away because it isn't good enough for 'em. There, sit you down here and see how you like that."

While she had been speaking, she had filled a basin from the big pot on the stove and had put a good slice of bread beside it and a spoon with which to eat the strong wholesome soup. The boy who had been warming himself at the fire, said, "Thank you—missis," and then looked at Effie.

"Lady," he said cheerfully, "I didn't know how hungry I was till I smelt this stuff. I shouldn't 'ave thought of arsking you—begging ain't exactly in my line—but —but would you mind if I took half of it 'ome to Nelly? She wants it more than I do—I'm strong and aught's good enough for me."

"No, my boy," Effie answered—"I'm sure cook will give you a jugful to take home to Nelly, and some other things as well. Won't you, cook?"

"And who is Nelly?" asked cook suspiciously. "Here, get your dinner, my lad, any way—we'll talk about the other afterwards."

Thus bidden the boy sat down and began to eat the soup, such soup as he had never tasted in all his life before. It was not only strong and meaty but there were several kinds of vegetables in it and some rice also.

"Nelly is his sister," Effie went on to the older woman. "He is the boy at the crossing into Lemon Gardens, you know, and there is no father or mother, only Ted and his little sister not eight years old. Ted keeps them both, but the poor child is down with inflammation of the lungs and yesterday he had to sell all his good warm clothes to get port-wine and beef-tea for her."

"No, I only fastened 'em, Lady," the boy corrected.

"Yes, he pawned them for three shillings, cook," Effie went on pitifully. "Think

of three shillings for all a sick child wants. And she has been very ill—yesterday he did not think she could get better."

"In—flame—mation of both lungs," put in Ted between his mouthfuls, "and the nearest squeak in the world, the doctor 'e tell me."

"Who's going to pay the doctor?" asked the cook, who was still more than a little suspicious.

"I dunno," Ted replied—"I told 'im I'd pay him orf at a shillin' a week and says he—'Jest you wait till I sends in your bill, my lad, and then we'll talk about that.' I don't believe he's going to send in no bill," he added, with a wise nod, and turned his attention to the soup again.

Effie and the cook exchanged glances, on Effie's part of triumph, on the cook's of doubt.

"Where do you live?" she asked of him.

"208, Denver Road, 'Ammersmith," he answered promptly.

"Could I see this sister of yours if I went there?"

Ted looked up. "Why, yes, missis, she's not like to be out," he answered—"but I'd rather you'd go when I was at 'ome. You might bounce in on her like and take her up sharp and she ain't up to much jest now—she's very ill, you know."

"I'll come on to-night after I've sent up dinner," said the cook who began to be convinced at last that there really was a sick child at home—"Master's dining out to-night."

"Then don't bother about dinner at all; I'll eat a good tea, and you can cut me some sandwiches later on," Effie cried joyously—"and—and I'll go with you, cook, eh?"

"I wouldn't, Miss Effie——" the cook began.

"Yes, do, Lady," the boy put in eagerly—"it's quite a decent 'ouse and our landlady's a most respectable party. And then

you'd feel satisfied as I 'adn't told you a pack o' lies."

"I am sure you have not," Effie cried earnestly, as young and impressionable things do. "Then cook will give you a good jug of her nice soup. And I'll give you a sovereign to get your clothes back and some coals and any thing else Nelly wants——"

"Miss Effie," broke in the cook—"now don't give him all that at once—there mayn't be a word of truth in it——"

But Ted Brown had started to his feet, his eyes blazing.

"God strike me dead if it ain't," he cried passionately.

"There, there," said Effie raising her hand—"*I* believe you."

CHAPTER II.

IF SHE WERE NOT SO RICH!

MISS STAUNTON left her young friend the boy with the broom to the tender mercies of the cook, having seen him safely embarked on a course of juicy cold beef and a big cup of fragrant and steaming cocoa. "I shall see you by and by," she said gayly, as she departed, and the next minute they saw her flit up the steps and disappear into the fog.

"H'm—it was a lucky day for you, my boy, when you happened to take her notice," remarked Jackson with considerable emphasis.

The boy sat back in his chair and looked at her. "Missis," he said—"I never 'ad such a good blow out afore. She's a beauty, your

young lady. What did you say her name was?"

"*I* didn't say her name was anything," retorted Jackson sharply—"She is Miss Staunton, and she's my master's ward."

"What's a ward?"

"A ward? Well, I can't rightly explain it. You see her father and mother's dead, and Mr. Legros is her guardian—he takes care of her money and such-like."

"Gives her plenty to spend seemingly," remarked the boy, thinking of the golden sovereign in his pocket, the first he had ever owned in his life.

"To waste," rose to Jackson's lips, but she bit the two slighting words off the end of her tongue so that they were never uttered. "What are you going to do now?" she asked instead.

"To get my clothes back again—" he answered instantly.—"It's shivery work standing about like this."

"I should think so. Well—then I'm to give you a jug of soup for the child."

"If you please, missis."

"And you won't break the jug or sell it for what it'll fetch, I hope?" she persisted.

"No, missis, it'll be there to-night when you come, I promise yer," he said, earnestly.

Meantime Effie Staunton had gone with some little difficulty, on account of the fog, back over the same ground again, past the crossing where the boy with the broom stood, down Lemon Gardens and into Codrington Road. Then she stopped at the door of a large handsome house, the windows of which were all gayly lighted up and showed cheerily through the murky atmosphere.

There was evidently a party going on, there was a sound of cups and saucers rattling and of merry voices in the dining-room, and some one was singing in one of the rooms above. "Will you take your cloak off, ma'am?" the servant asked.

"Not yet, thanks," then turned to a young man who had just come downstairs

—"Oh! Mr. Beaufort, how d'you do?"

"You are *so* late," said the young man reproachfully as he took her hand and held it. "I have been downstairs three times to see if you had not come."

"Yes, I know I am late. I set off to come more than half an hour ago and something happened to send me back again."

"Come and have some tea," Beaufort suggested, drawing her towards the dining-room. "A woman is squalling upstairs and Mrs. Jack looks the picture of misery if any one moves or even breathes."

"Well, I should like some tea, I admit —I must tell Mrs. Jack that you beguiled me in here if she finds me out before I go upstairs. Yes, two lumps of sugar——"

"I *know* how much sugar you take," he put in with reproachful tones,

Miss Staunton prevaricated a little— "Do you?" she said, half shyly.

"You know I do. Now, sit there on the sofa—it's the most comfortable corner in the room. Try some of these cress and

egg sandwiches—they're quite lovely."

Miss Staunton did seat herself on the sofa, she did also try the cress and egg sandwiches, and she too pronounced them quite lovely. Beaufort got himself a cup of coffee, and sat down on the sofa beside her. "And what happened to make you so late?" he inquired, with an air of deep interest.

And Effie told him how she had come out, how she had caught the boy with the broom smoking and how she had scolded him, how she had heard all his story and had taken him back to her guardian's house and had given him a real good meal. "And I am going to-night with cook to see the sick child and decide what can best be done for her," she ended.

Now Austin Beaufort was only a young man, in truth he was no more than four and twenty years old, but he did not, as she more than half expected he would do, treat her story with good-natured contempt, tell her that she was too tender-

hearted for this everyday world of wickedness, hint that the boy with the broom was a professional thief probably, and most likely would end by letting a gang of burglars into the house who would relieve her of all her jewels and her guardian of all his plate. No, he heard all the story and then he said—"Poor little chap!"

Miss Staunton's heart gave quite a sharp throb of intense gratitude. "I'm so glad to—that is, not to be made to feel ashamed of my weakness," she cried. "I did believe him, I believed every word of it; and oh! he was so hungry, I never saw a boy eat so, *never*. And I am going to see for myself to-night. You know there can be no deception about a child's illness."

"Where do they live?" Beaufort asked suddenly.

"At 208, Denver Road, Hammersmith," she replied.

"But you can't go there—it's impossible," he burst out.

"But I am going there," she retorted.

"I can go anywhere with cook. Why she's five and forty, every day of it."

"I daresay she is, but your guardian, Mr. Legros, he will never allow it."

"Of course he wouldn't; he never allows anything hardly; but then I never ask him when I particularly want to do anything, so he seldom knows any of my escapades."

"But he will miss you."

"No, he dines with a City Company to-night. He won't see me to-night in any case. If he does happen to hear of it he wouldn't mind much—not when it is over and done with, Oh! I shall be quite, quite safe."

"Look here, Miss Staunton," said Beaufort, seriously, "it's awfully kind and sweet and good of you to want to go and see this sick child, but Denver Road, Hammersmith, is no place for you, especially at night. Now do be guided by me in this. Let the cook—I've no doubt she's a highly respectable person very well able

to take care of herself—go, and report the result to you. Believe me, it will be much the best in every way."

For a moment she seemed inclined to give way, then she looked up at him with a resolute shake of the head.

"No, I can't give it up—I must go. You see it's like this. I promised the boy I would go, and he expects me. Now if I break my promises to him, how can I expect him to keep faith with me? I simply can't do it."

"Then, Miss Staunton, let me go with you," he urged. "I can't bear to think of you going into a strange neighborhood by yourself, or at least what is practically by yourself."

"Oh, yes, you may go too if you like. I shall take the brougham, of course. There will be plenty of room for you, and I would rather have a man with me than go just with Jackson. Then will you come at eight o'clock? Will you call for me?"

"Certainly I will, and with pleasure—

but hadn't you better go earlier? What time do you dine?"

"I am not going to dine at all—I am going to have a good tea, and Jackson is going to send me up some nice sandwiches when we come in. You see she couldn't cook a dinner and dress herself to go out with me too."

"No, to be sure not. But you could go at seven in that case."

"Yes—Mr. Legros will have left long before seven.

"And the carriage——"

"Oh! he has his own—I have mine—I can choose my own time so far as that is concerned. Then I will go at seven—you will go back with me from here then?"

"Yes, if you'll let me."

"But your dinner—I can't give you any dinner, because you see I have promised cook to have none."

"Well, it won't hurt me to go without once in a way," he said, laughing at her

perturbed face—" and, by-the-bye, it is twenty minutes past six now."

"I must go upstairs," she cried. "How rude of me to stop down here so long."

Beaufort saw no more of her for some little time, for when she appeared in the drawing-room she was at once surrounded by a crowd of admirers, for Effie Staunton was not only a rich but also an exceedingly pretty girl, and an uncommonly nice one into the bargain.

However, at a quarter to seven she bade her hostess adieu and walked home with Beaufort beside her.

"Tell Jackson," she said to the servant who let them in, "that I want her to go with me as soon as she possibly can—and will you send down to the stables and tell Hunt that I want the brougham as soon as it can be got ready. I shall not keep him late to-night."

"Come in here," she said to Beaufort, and led him into her own little sanctum

into which no one visiting the house went without her special invitation.

In less than ten minutes Jackson, looking aggressively middle-aged and powerful in a neat black gown and bonnet, came in with a basket to show Effie what she had put ready for the little invalid—a bottle of good old port, begged from the butler (who had orders to supply Miss Staunton's charities) a little brandy, a bottle of jelly, a bottle of beef-tea, a packet of tea, some sugar and enough food of a more ordinary kind to last the boy with the broom for a couple of days.

"It is all quite beautiful, Jackson, and you're a dear kind old thing in spite of your cautiousness," Effie cried. "I am going to take Mr. Beaufort—he thinks I shouldn't be safe with you alone."

"I shall feel very much safer with the gentleman, Miss Effie," returned Jackson decidedly.

"Then that is all right," Effie cried—"and Jackson, I have two or three little

things to take, flannels and linen and so on. I will go and get them. Let me know when the carriage comes."

She was off like a flash of light—and then Jackson went ponderously or rather patronizingly away, leaving Beaufort by himself.

He stood for a moment looking into the fire—

"'Pon my soul," he said to himself—"she's the most charming—and if I wasn't so poor—if she wasn't so rich—I'd—I'd—ask her to marry me to-morrow—no, *to-night.*"

CHAPTER III.

NO. 208 DENVER STREET, HAMMERSMITH.

REALLY No. 208 Denver Street, Hammersmith, was not a very bad kind of street. It was different to Egerton Square, of course, and it is possible that if Miss Staunton had passed down it after dusk, she might have had her pocket picked or that she might have found herself the object of attention the reverse of pleasant or indeed conventional, but protected as she was by the presence of the staid servant and the young man she found Denver Street quite fit to visit.

The boy with the broom had described his landlady as being a respectable party, and in an instant Effie Staunton realized that she was respectable enough after a

fashion. She also realized that the mistress of No. 208 Denver Street had a tongue, a very remarkable specimen of its kind.

"Little girl very ill here—of the name of Brown," she repeated in answer to Effie's question. "Indeed and we have, miss, very ill. But they're expecting you, and Nelly, she's a turn better to-night—Ted, he comes in and he brings a great jug o' soup with him and it seemed to put new strength into her like. Ay, miss, but the two little uns have had a hard pinch this winter, they have that. Nelly'd never have lived if it hadn't been for that boy; he have slaved and pinched himself to perwide for her—if he'd been her own father he couldn't have done more."

"Could we see her?" Effie inquired gently, "I have brought her a few things to strengthen her up."

She was not used to dealing with this kind of person, and was terribly afraid of wounding her feelings. Mrs. Morse, however, although she was quite a connoisseur

of feeling, did not readily take the hint. She babbled rapidly on.

"Have you now, miss? Well, it is good of you—I'm sure some folks is that lucky—not that I grudge a bit o' luck to the children, poor things, but I've had troubles myself. My first husband—as fine a man as ever trod in shoe-leather—he was killed at Victoria Station and was dead before they could get to him. Eleven years I was married to him and never a cross word did he give me all that time except once he called me 'Jane' instead of 'Jennie;' and whatever I could ha' married this feller for——"

"But the lady wants to see the little girl," put in Beaufort mildly, yet in a voice which distinctly made itself felt.

"Certainly, sir; this way, miss. Eh! but it isn't many ladies and gentlemen I've shown up to them, poor things. I doubt you're the first, except the doctor. I'll go first with the candle."

She led the way with a flaring tallow-

candle, which she had been holding all the time while she harangued Effie—and really harangued is the proper word to use, for she poured out her remarks at an inordinately rapid rate and with an aggrieved expression of face and tone such as made poor Effie feel that in some way she was responsible for all the good woman's worries and troubles.

It seemed a long way upstairs, but at last the landlady knocked at a door, and the boy with the broom opened it. I do not mean to convey that he had the broom in his hand just then, on the contrary, it was quietly reposing in a corner of the room, put away for the night.

"Evening, Lady," said the boy with his quick salute; "Evening, sir;" then, in a quick undertone to Jackson, "Eh, but missis, she *did* enjoy the soup, that she did."

"I am glad of it," returned Jackson, who felt that she could allow herself to be amiable now that the sick child was an

established fact instead of a something which might possibly be purely imaginary, having its existence only in Ted Brown's fertile brain.

Effie went straight into the little, hot, stuffy room, and up to the poor little bed in which the child was lying.

"How are you to-night, dear?" she asked in her tender tones.

"Nicely to-night, thank you, lady," the little girl replied.

She was feverish and rather excited, but Effie could see how very ill she had been, and was still. She was worn to a shadow, with great blue eyes surrounded by dark rings, and her very dark hair was plaited into a broad braid and stretched out over the poor pillow.

Effie sat down. "You've been very ill, dear. I'm so sorry. I didn't know till this afternoon but now you shall be taken more care of. You see Ted can't manage the things that are best for you—soups and so on. So Jackson and I have come

down to bring you some beef-tea and jelly. You'll like that, won't you ?"

Nelly laid back and gazed on the beautiful vision with dilating eyes. She had never seen "a real lady" so near before, and Effie was to her like some beauteous being from another world. She could not bring herself to speak, she could only gaze and gaze at her with all her poor fever-bright eyes. Effie laid her hand over the little hot one nearest to her.

"You don't mind my coming to see you, I hope, dear ?" she said, very gently.

The child roused herself with an effort and smiled, such a bright smile in spite of the wasted little face. Effie did not wonder that the boy had been such a good brother to her. She scarcely seemed to understand Effie's question, for, as the poor generally are, she had been accustomed to live more or less in public always. I say more or less, for the two children certainly knew more of privacy and the sanctity of home than is the case with most of their class,

who are in the habit of having all things in common with their neighbors, who know not what it is to have peace and quietness and to mind their own business without seeking or having the opinion and the interference of everybody within a given radius of their poor homes.

"Why, lady," she exclaimed in a little weak, astonished voice, "Ted an' me thinks it 'eavenly of you to come and see me when I'm ill. Is that the lady what made this soup?"

"Yes—this is Mrs. Jackson," answered Effie smiling. "Was the soup good? Did you like it?"

"Good," the child echoed, "my—wasn't it good, jest. And Ted's got his clothes back, lady, he's got 'em all on—an'—an' I'm so tired."

"Poor little soul, talking is bad for you," Effie murmured—"see, dear, I have brought you a warm little jacket to wear over your night-gown—that will make you more

comfortable than a shawl. Shall we put it on now?"

It was an old dressing-jacket of her own, which had shrunk in washing to a size not very much too large for a child of eight years' old. Nelly was only too glad to have it put on, for to her eyes, unused to smart attire, the pale blue flannel with its embroidered edges was quite a dream of beauty such as she had sometimes seen in shop windows, but had never thought it possible that she might one day possess for herself. And when it was safely on, how she wrapped herself with dignity in its soft warm folds and laid back again on her pillows serenely happy in her new treasure.

"I shall soon be well now," she said to Effie, who laughed and told her not to get well too quickly.

"And tell me, little one," she said, suddenly reminded of the time to come—"what have you got to wear when you do get well? Have you any flannels?"

"Yes, I've a flannel petticoat, lady," Nelly answered.

"And your frock?"

Nelly looked distressed. "Oh! my frock has got so little for me, but it'll 'ave to do, lady, yet a bit, for Ted——"

"I think we will manage a new frock for you," said Effie gently.

"Oh! lady!" the child cried—then laid silent for a minute. "I feel," she said after a while in a trembling voice—"as if I'd get into 'eaven—yes, I do."

"My child,"—returned Effie—"Jackson has made you some nice beef-tea hot, and I want you to take it and a little wine and get as quickly as you can into the heaven of sleep, for that will do more to make you strong and well than anything else."

She was very tired, poor little soul; the excitement of Ted's great news and of having a real, lovely, kind lady coming to see her, added to the severe illness which she had but just passed through, of which in reality she had but barely turned the

corner, all had tended to exhaust her and she was glad to take the good beef-tea which Jackson had made hot over the fire and to drink a tablespoonful of Mr. Legros' good old port, and then lie down again on her pillows and close her weary eyes.

"Good-night, Nelly—I shall soon come again," said Effie gently.

"Dear lady," murmured Nelly drowsily.

Effie turned away from the bed with tears in her eyes—

"I'm so glad I came," she said trying to speak unconcernedly and winking hard to disperse them without the ignominy of wiping them away—"But she will do all right. Ted, I'm glad you've got a screen—it's so good for her to have this draught kept away."

"It was mother's screen," Ted explained, for truly such an article is a somewhat unusual piece of furniture in Denver Street, Hammersmith, and the boy felt that as such it needed some explanation, "All the furniture was mother's, lady, and I

thought I'd rather sell my clothes than part with the things that was 'ers. I knew I'd manage to get them back again, but the furniture p'raps I couldn't."

Effie looked round the room. There were traces of refinement about it in spite of its poverty. There were two or three colored pictures on the walls and one or two bits of china, two little glass silvered vases and a china dog of the poodle order. There was an eight-day clock against the wall, not going apparently since the hands pointed to half-past one, and there were three very good Windsor chairs, and a big shabby rocking-chair with ragged dimity cushions to it. The fender certainly might have been in better order and the grate itself cleaner and brighter, but the few plates and dishes on the little dresser were all clean, and the general air of the little room really was not so bad. The only really good-looking article that she saw was a desk of rosewood with a little mother o' pearl inlaid work about it.

"'Ere's the doctor," said the boy, as a quick, brisk footstep was heard on the stairs, and he ran to open the door.

"Now, how are we getting on, eh? Why, you have visitors," he exclaimed as he caught sight of Effie.

"A lady come to see Nelly, sir," explained Ted in quite a flush of pride.

"And how is Nelly? Good-evening, madam," to Effie.

"I'm afraid we have been taking great liberties with your little patient, doctor," said Effie smiling.

The doctor's keen eyes had in a moment taken in her appearance and that of her escort—had seen the dusty bottle of port on the table, and the mould of jelly, the jug of beef-tea, and he smiled back in reply.

"The kind of liberty any doctor likes to have taken with his patients, my dear madam," he said, cheerfully. "And in this case these things were sadly needed.

Ted, my boy, I see you've got your clothes back again."

"All the lady's doin', sir," said Ted, turning furiously red at having to speak up and testify to his new friend's goodness.

"Ah, you have found a good friend! And now let me see the child."

"You would like us to go," said Effie.

"Not at all—not at all—you would like to know how she is going on, wouldn't you? Why, how smart we are!" he exclaimed as he perceived Nellie's new attire. "And asleep."

"No, doctor, I'm not quite asleep," the little patient said opening her big eyes and smiling up at him—"but so comfor'able, so comfor'able."

"I'm sure you must be. I'll listen a moment at that dicky-bird in your chest—queer place for a little girl to carry a dicky-bird, eh, madam," smiling at Effie.

"A dicky-bird she will be glad to be rid of," said Effie in return.

"Why, yes—that's so! Ah! it's just

ready to spread its wings and fly away, Nelly—I shouldn't wonder if it isn't gone by the time *you* wake. And what have you had to eat?" taking the little slender wrist in his and bringing out his watch.

"Such soup—and beef-tea—and wine," answered Nelly proudly.

"And a little nasty medicine, eh?"

"Not very nasty, sir," she replied.

"Ah! you're a good little girl—one dose more at—at nine o'clock and one at twelve *if she is awake, Ted.* If she's asleep let her have it when she does wake. How'll you know the time, eh? You've not got the clock going."

"No, sir, it strikes—Nelly couldn't a-bear it—Mrs. Morse brings her watch up when she goes to bed and I 'ave that."

"That's all right. Keep her warm—do just what I told you this morning—I'll come in again to-morrow by nine o'clock. Good-night, little one," then he got up and turned to Effie. "I should like to speak to you," he said in an undertone.

Effie followed him out on to the landing. "Young lady," he said abruptly—"you have saved that child's life."

"Oh! is it possible?" she cried.

"Certainly it is. During the whole of yesterday her life wasn't worth a rush. The boy parted with his clothes and made a great effort to get her proper nourishment, which certainly prevented her dying of exhaustion then. This morning she was a trifle better—very little—and I should not have been surprised to find that she had slipped quietly away any time during the day. Your good food and wine have won the day. I congratulate you and it is a sweet child that you have saved, a sweet child. You will see the case through, I imagine."

"Certainly I will. And I must try what I can do for them afterwards. My guardian Mr. Legros is very rich, he has a large house in the city. I must see if he wont take the boy as messenger or something of that kind. And—and doctor will you send

your account for this illness in to me?"

The doctor laughed outright. "My dear young lady," he said genially—"I never thought of sending an account in to the poor bits of bairns at all."

"All the more pleasure to me to settle it," said Effie smiling too—"I am sure you must have many such cases as these from which you never get a farthing, and I am very well able to pay this. Please let me."

"Why certainly, my dear young lady," he said frankly. "Heaven knows money is not so plentiful in Hammersmith that a medical man can afford to throw away the chance of it when it comes to him. But I don't know your name. May I——"

"Oh! yes. My name is Staunton. I live with my guardian, Mr. Legros, in Egerton Square. Stay, if I have a card I will give you one."

She found that she had a card in the pocket of her jacket, and she gave it to him. "Many thanks," he said. "I'm afraid I haven't such a thing about me—

but my name is Hammond, Dr. Hammond —I am pretty well known in Hammersmith. Good-night. I am delighted to have met you."

She saw him disappear down the stairs before she went back into the room. "We had better be going," she said to Beaufort, who had quietly sat down on one of the Windsor chairs and had made himself of as little importance as possible—"Are you ready?"

"In a minute, Miss Effie," said Jackson. "Now, my boy, keep this outside on the window-ledge and give her a spoonful or so when she wakes or gets a bit low. And you'll call as you pass in the morning?"

"Yes, mum," he answered.

"Yes, be sure you call," put in Effie. "Oh, she is fast asleep this time. Good-night, Ted, get all the rest you can. Good-night."

"Good-night, lady," said Ted, following them to the door, then added after their departing figures what he was too shy

to say in Effie's presence—"Gord love your pretty face, lady, and if ever Ted Brown can do aught for you, dash my buttons if he don't do it like a shot."

CHAPTER IV.

A GOLDEN MOMENT.

THE three drove back to Egerton Square almost in silence. Jackson naturally did not talk in the presence of her superiors, Effie was thinking hard about the future of the two little waifs she had succored, and Beaufort was thinking equally hard about Effie.

It must be admitted that Effie Staunton occupied his thoughts very much at this time. She was so pretty, so winsome, so bright and charming, and he was almost sure that she liked him. By a thousand little signs he had believed it during the past few months, and every time that he saw her he became more sure that it was so. And yet she was so rich. Not that he felt her wealth to be the very smallest

barrier between himself and her. He was not mercenary, and he was genuinely and thoroughly in love with her, and her money was in his opinion, but an accidental adjunct to herself, her sweet self. He had no idea that she would give any question of money a thought when the so much more important one of love was present, but there was her guardian! And I am bound to say that the existence, the mere fact of the existence of Miss Staunton's guardian, weighed upon Austin Beaufort's mind like a lump of lead.

He was something in the City and he was very rich! A fatal combination for poor Beaufort's peace of mind! He could not anyhow see himself approaching this very formidable gentleman in the character of a pretender to Miss Staunton's hand.

Vaguely he tried to realize it, the hard successful financier or banker or merchant or whatever he happened to be, sitting quietly at his ease in the handsome library in Egerton Square. Himself stand-

ing, flurried, helpless, conscious of his own shortcomings in the possession of those attributes which are considered most desirable in a prospective husband for a girl pretty enough and possibly rich enough to aspire to a coronet as her future portion in life. He could see Mr. Legros' cold, calculating, fish-like eyes reading him through and through, he could almost read the thoughts passing to and fro in that astute mind, the thoughts which said but too plainly, "Is this young man a fortune-hunter or is he really and genuinely in love with my ward?"

He could hear the cold and measured voice—Mr. Legros spoke at the rate of about four words to the minute—asking, "And what do you propose to settle upon Miss Staunton?" and he knew that he could never have the courage to "up and say" that he proposed to settle himself and his salary of two hundred and fifty pounds a year upon a young lady who was, if report spoke truly, worth half a million of money!

No, he was brave enough in a physical sense, indeed he had never known the sensation of personal fear at all, but the very thought of the cold eyes and measured tones of Effie's guardian were, at any time, enough to make him turn cold and shiver as if he had suddenly seen a ghost.

And yet, when they reached Egerton Square and Effie bade him hospitably "Come in and share my sandwiches," he could not resist her and followed her into the handsome house.

"Miss Staunton," he said—"has your guardian ever been married?"

They were standing near the fireplace in the dining-room, a most gorgeous apartment all gold as to the walls, with dark oak furniture and masses of rare old china arranged in cabinets in the corners and recesses. He was a little oppressed with the wealth and luxury of the room,—the stained-glass windows, the tall pier-glasses, the great Venetian gasalier, used now for the electric light, the silver gleaming on the

carved sideboard, nay, even by the blazing fire, half of coal and half of sweet-scented wood, which was burning in the elaborate grate.

"Has your guardian ever been married?" he asked.

Effie looked at him—"Oh! yes. Mrs. Legros, only died about five years ago. Why?"

"I don't know—I wondered if he had, that was all. Did you know her?"

"Oh! yes. She was the most beautiful, stately, dignified woman in the whole world, I think—not very pleasant, you know—not—not a bit chummy, that's to say, but always remembering that she had been born a Warwickshire Skeffington-Skyffington, and that she had married into a City set and was not of a City set. She used to keep up his dignity you know, gave big dinners and so on, but she never mixed her set and his, never. One night she would sit there between an earl and a bishop, and the next night between an alderman and a great

mercnant. 'Royalty and great official people have to mix all these people together on state occasions,' she used to say—'but I am not royal nor yet official, so I have to do neither and I don't do it.' Oh! yes, Mr. Beaufort, my guardian was very much married, very much so."

"Ah!—was he fond of her?"

"Oh! I think so—I believe he adored her. He was awfully good and devoted to her, any way, and he has never got out of her cold way of expressing herself."

"That's likely enough," said Beaufort toying with a little brazen figure on the chimney-shelf. "Do you know, Miss Staunton, I'm half afraid of your guardian."

"Of my guardian—afraid of him! But why?"

"Oh! well, I am. You see I don't know him very well—I'm not one of his lot. I'm only a clerk in a stockbroker's office although my mother's an earl's daughter and my father is proud of owning some of the best blood in England. But when I come here

and your guardian looks right through me, I feel as if, as if a clerk in a stockbroker's office with two hundred and fifty a year and nothing else, had no right to be here."

He did not look at her while he spoke but kept toying nervously with the little brazen image, and Effie, who knew perfectly well what he meant, and who really would much rather have had him speak boldly out and ask her to marry him there and then, half laughed out of sheer nervousness and began to play with her rings.

"Oh! you mistake us altogether, Mr. Beaufort," she said in a trembling voice—"We don't set much value on money here, except for what it brings. I suppose—at least, I didn't quite mean that, and——"

"What did you mean?" he asked in a dangerously tender voice.

"Oh! nothing—nothing. And indeed I don't think you need think that about my guardian—he has a stiff manner but he has a very kind heart under it, while as for *me*——" and then she stopped and looked

at him with eloquent eyes which plainly invited him to go on and say what was in his mind.

But Beaufort's eyes were still fixed on the little brazen image and he never saw the look. "I never thought that *you* cared about money one way or the other," he said. "Of course it must be very jolly to have a lot of money and a man would be a fool to pretend otherwise, but I've always rubbed along without much so far, and I've had an uncommonly good time, take it on the whole. There's only one great drawback to being poor—if a man's poor and he has the misfortune to fall in love with a rich girl, it's so difficult for him to make her people believe that it's the girl he wants and that he doesn't think of the money at all."

"But if the girl believes it?"—Effie breathed, her heart beating almost to suffocation.

"Oh! it's easy enough to make the girl believe it *if* she cares about him, but it's her people that——"

"But it doesn't much matter what her people"——Effie began, when the door opened and a footman came in and began to busy himself about the table.

"That child is going to get better," remarked Beaufort, with a sudden change of tone.

"I quite hope so," returned Effie, who was ready to cry.

"Supper is served, ma'am," said the footman urbanely and all unconscious that Beaufort was positively thirsting for his heart's blood at that very moment—"Game-pie, ma'am?"

What an exchange—a game-pie instead of a golden moment!

CHAPTER V.

MOMENTS QUICKLY FLYING.

How strange it is that if we once let an opportunity slip, it never seems to come back to us. So it was with Beaufort and Effie Staunton on the evening that they made a pilgrimage together in the cause of charity, or if not exactly in the cause of charity in both cases, certainly in that divine feeling on the one hand, and in that of true affection on the other. But though they had been so near, so very, very near to the magic land that night, yet the moment passed and was gone forever. They discussed the game-pie and some cold pheasant and an omelette happily enough, but all in the presence of the decorous and solemn footman, who waited on them assiduously, and did not leave the room for a moment, it

being an unbreakable rule of the house that the dining-room door was never opened during the course of a meal, all the plates and dishes being sent up from the kitchen below by means of a dinner-lift.

If only Beaufort could have got quiet speech of that solemn footman for a couple of minutes, he would have tried the effect of a silver key to opening that door. But could a young man tip a servant in the presence of the young mistress of the house, as Effie virtually was? Impossible, clearly, and Beaufort resigned himself to the inevitable, and settled down, in spite of the real disappointment in his heart, to make a substantial meal. For he was dreadfully hungry, a young man of twenty-four years old who has eaten nothing but a pretence of afternoon tea since one o'clock when he had a light lunch of stilton and pulled head with a glass of bitter beer with which to wash it down, does in the ordinary course of things get to feel inconveniently hungry by ten o'clock at night. You see,

after all, they had not left Egerton Square till after half-past seven, and being a foggy night, they had not got to Denver Street till after eight o'clock ! They had stayed there some three-quarters of an hour and did not get back to Egerton Square till half-past nine or more nearly a quarter to ten, the fog having increased so much that the coachman had to get down and lead the horse a great part of the way. So, by the time the game-pie was fairly under his nose, Beaufort remembered what he had forgotten before, that he was desperately hungry, that he was positively ravenous. And how good that game-pie was—without doubt Jackson was a cook that even the rich City owner of the house in Egerton Square might justly feel proud of !

" Yes, I'll have a little more pie, Barker, please," said he, when the footman came to ask his next pleasure.

" It is a good pie," remarked Effie, who also was nearly famished—and then she looked at him with twinkling eyes and

somehow they both laughed and laughed and laughed until they could laugh no longer.

"What are you laughing at?" Beaufort cried at last.

He was breathless and weary with his mirth, his eyes were dim and he was in the dark as to her meaning, equally as much as she was as to his—"It was so absurd," Effie cried in reply, and then they laughed again as only young things can laugh.

They were both so young and both so gay of heart and they were both so ridiculously hungry too, and till ten o'clock is a long time to wait for your dinner.

"I don't see anything to laugh at—it *is* a good pie," said Beaufort stoutly.

"Yes, it *is* a good pie; then why did you laugh?" she retorted.

But all the same, (though the usually solemn footman was hiding his grins at the sideboard, grins of sheer sympathy with their infectious gayety, for he had not the

very smallest inkling of their real feelings,) he knew and she knew just what it was that had tickled their fancy so ; it was the absurd want of analogy between the situation and the game-pie, between the desperate earnestness of their interrupted conversation and the artificial and somewhat inane remarks which the sudden advent of Barker made necessary,

But they were very gay, very gay. Effie talked a great deal about the boy with the broom and his little sister, and Beaufort listened with deep interest, as indeed he would have listened to any topic of conversation upon which she was pleased to dilate.

"I was awfully interested in the boy, you know," she said while Barker was changing the pie for the cold pheasant— "But the girl interests me more somehow, and her face strikes me as—as not exactly familiar and yet I fancy I've seen it before somewhere. I don't think I can have, though—I don't know that it was the child

herself whom I seem to know, as it was that trick of heavily lifting her big eyes upwards, that I seemed to know so well. I daresay it was only fancy, after all, and possibly, poor little soul, she looks more interesting now than she ever looked before in all her life."

"Oh! that's very likely," Beaufort returned—"seemed a nice little soul enough, and the boy is deadly sharp, deadly sharp."

"Oh! as sharp as a needle—and what a good boy! I must see what Mr. Legros will do to help me."

"You think he will?"

"Oh! yes—he is very good-natured in that way—he believes in helping those who in themselves are worth helping. He has several clerks now whom he started from the very beginning, and he thinks all the world of them and they are naturally devoted to him."

"You'll tell him you went down there?"

"Oh! yes, of course—I always tell him everything, though sometimes I don't tell

him till afterwards! He is very cautious in looking ahead, the result of having been all his life looking for breakers on in front. But when a thing is done, he never worries, he makes the best or admits the worst of it. He is a most comfortable person to deal with, although his first instinct is always to say no."

Beaufort's heart rose to fever-height while she was speaking, for an inspiration occurred to him—what if he could persuade her to go and do the irrevocable deed and to tell her guardian about it afterwards? He looked at her keenly—would she do it? No, most emphatically, no—and down went Beaufort's heart to zero as he instinctively realized the certainty of that, while, as her concluding words fell upon his ears, his heart seemed to go down still further, if it is possible to go down below the point at which gradation begins! "His first instinct is always to say no," she said, and Beaufort knew but too well that Mr. Legros' first instinct, aye, and probably his last, would

be to return a very, very unmistakable and emphatic no to him when he should, if ever he could summon up sufficient courage to do it, suggest himself as a suitor for Miss Staunton's hand.

It was wonderful what a long time that simple little supper took them to eat. Partly because Beaufort had an uneasy feeling that it would be the right thing for him to betake himself away when it was finished. And before it came to an end Effie turned her head to listen and said—"There's the carriage—Mr. Legros is back. How surprised he will be."

And Mr. Legros was surprised without doubt—"Why, Effie," he exclaimed, when he entered the dining-room, "what are you after? Not finished dinner yet?"

Effie jumped up from her chair and drew him to the fire.

"Yes, Guardy, we are finished—you know Mr. Beaufort, don't you? Well," as the two shook hands—"we've got a long and thrilling story to tell you."

"Hey!" He looked at her sharply, then glanced at Beaufort—"a story—what sort of a story?"

"Well, a very sad story, dear Guardy," she answered, "come and sit here and I will tell you all about it."

She drew his own chair a shade nearer to the fire and told him all the day's adventures from beginning to end, all about the boy's ragged condition, his hunger, his uncomplaining pluck, his unwillingness to tell her the reason of his want of clothing, and finally how she, with Jackson and Mr. Beaufort, had gone down to Denver Street, Hammersmith, to see for herself whether his story was true or not.

"Then how came you to be in it?" Mr. Legros asked of Beaufort in a puzzled tone.

"I met Miss Staunton at a party this afternoon," he replied—"and it didn't seem to me the safest thing in the world for a young lady to go prowling about back streets in Hammersmith on a night like this, even with a brougham and a staid

person like Jackson, so I offered to go, offered—well I mean I begged and prayed and implored to be taken as an escort."

"Quite right—very sensible of you. Effie is without fear of any kind, more's the pity," remarked Mr. Legros, good-naturedly.

He had dined well and was in a genial and agreeable mood. Beaufort thought he had never seen him to greater advantage, or less pompous, and he patted the girl's hand kindly as he spoke.

"You'll do something to help me with him, Guardy, won't you?" she asked.

"To help you? Yes. I'll give you a pound or two if you want them," he answered.

"No," she said quickly—"as far as mere money goes he's all right. But he is such a sharp boy—isn't he, Mr. Beaufort? And so good to the poor little sister, and he didn't snivel or whine or even *ask* me for a farthing, except in the ordinary way of the crossing-sweeping business. But he's

thrown away on a crossing, Guardy, he is indeed, and you'll say so when you've had a talk with him——"

"Want's me to take him into partnership," said Mr. Legros aside to Beaufort.

"No, not at present," said Effie, seriously. "But I do want you to take him on at the office as a messenger or as extra boy or something or other, and I'll send him to a night-school and he'll soon get on—I'm convinced of it."

"And get to a partnership after all," Mr. Legros said, smiling—"that is the goal of all messenger-boys, eh? Just as every soldier's knapsack is supposed to hold a Field-Marshal's *baton*, so every errand boy may aspire to become the head of the firm in time."

"Ah! you wait till you've seen my boy," Effie cried, who was proof against dissuasion and always held on to a pet idea like grim death or a bull-dog, it being, as her guardian often said, a blessing that she was not troubled with many ideas which she

considered worth carrying through until they reached maturity.

"Well—well—we shall see."

"And you'll see him—when?"

"Oh! spare me—here's a sovereign for you."

Effie possessed herself of the sovereign instantly, but reiterated her question—"You will see him, Guardy, dear? Won't you? And when? To-morrow morning, eh? He is coming on his way to work to tell me how the poor child is. Half-past nine—will that do? Will that do for you?"

"Will it do for *me?* as if *I* was anxious to see the young imp," Mr. Legros cried. scoffingly.

"I may say half-past nine?" urged Effie.

"Oh, you had better offer him the partnership at once," he cried. "What's the good of my going through the formality of an interview?"

"I shall say half-past nine," said Effie, *complacently.*

CHAPTER VI.

A NEW START IN LIFE.

A MESSAGE came up at eight o'clock with Effie Staunton's early cup of tea, to let her know that the boy with the broom had just called, that Nelly had had a very good night and was decidedly better this morning, and that he would, as bidden, come at half-past nine to see Miss Staunton. So at that hour, just as Mr. Legros had finished his breakfast, Barker appeared in the dining-room to say that the boy from the corner was waiting below.

"Bring him up," said Effie.

Mr. Legros grunted, and shook out his paper.

"Tell him to wipe his feet."

"The young gentleman 'ave wiped 'is

feet, sir," said Barker solemnly. Barker was terribly put out. He considered it beneath him to announce boys with brooms.

"Then bring him up," said Mr. Legros, sharply, having little or no sympathy with Barker's absurd prejudices. Mr. Legros made a regular habit of calling everybody's prejudices absurd, except his own. You may have known people of that kind before.

After a minute or two the disgusted Barker ushered the boy into the room, the more disgusted because, as Ted had industriously cleaned and polished his boots at the corner, he had had no excuse for making himself disagreeable over the condition thereof.

"And 'e walked in just as bold as brass," he grumbled to Jackson afterwards, "and touched 'is 'air and says, 'Morning, sir.'"

"What would you 'ave him do, you ninny?" Jackson demanded indignantly—"stand on his 'ead or how?"

Meantime, Ted Brown, who had no inten-

tion of doing anything out of the common and was not a bit abashed by the splendor of the gorgeous room, although he had never even peeped into such a specimen of this Arabian Night's Entertainment before, had touched his hair and had said—"Morning, sir"—"Morning, lady," and waited to hear their pleasure.

"Nelly is better this morning, I hear," said Effie, who was quite nervous lest he should not acquit himself creditably.

"Oh! yes, lady; she's quite bright and slept nicely, thank you," he replied—"an' she 'ad a good breakfast for 'er. A bit o' jelly, and some beef-tea and drink o' warm milk."

"That is good," Effie said, kindly—then finding that Mr. Legros was evidently not inclined to help her out, she broke the ice and introduced the subject boldly. "Can you read and write, Ted?"

"Well, lady, I can read big print a little," he answered—"but not writin'—and I never was learned to write. I've always

had to work since mother died, an' there was Nelly to keep. She goes to school—the School Board is always a'ter 'er."

"How is it they don't come down on you?" asked Mr. Legros, speaking for the first time.

"Why, sir, they would if they knoo jist 'ow old I was," Ted explained—"but some-'ow they've never found out and I can't afford to tell 'em. They think becos I keeps the 'ome going that I'm sixteen or seventeen——"

"And you are—?"

"I'm twelve," he replied, simply.

"And how is it the police at your crossing don't ask your age, for you don't look even that?"

Ted's reply was simple and to the point—"Why, sir, the peelers is very good-natured on the 'ole if you don't sauce them; I've always kep' in with 'em, and—and they winks at it."

Effie went off into fits of laughter—"Well—it is very wrong—they ought not

to wink at it because it would be a great advantage to you to go to school," Mr. Legros remarked severely.

"But who'd keep the 'ome goin'?" asked Ted in dismay.

"The State," returned Mr. Legros with ponderous wit, "takes but very small account of such trifles as homes. However, I don't want to waste my time and yours discussing that question—Miss Staunton here wishes me to do something for you. Do you *like* sweeping a crossing?"

"No, sir—I 'ate it," returned the boy promptly.—"Mine used to be a very good crossing till they began to build the flats at the corner—now it's all dust and rubbish and I can't deep it decent nohow. And they starts pullin' down the rest of the old wall this week and puttin' a 'oarding up, and then ther'll be bills *all* the way and dust and 'alf bricks and old tins and such like, an' I know I'll never 'ave a decent crossin' again. It's fit to break yer 'eart sometimes."

"But you like a good crossing such as it used to be?"

"No, sir, I don't—it's 'orrid work—you gets cold and wet or 'ot and dry and the takin's uncertain all the time."

"Would you like to go into an office—as messenger-boy?"—Mr. Legros asked.

Ted's eyes sparkled—but the minute, he sighed—"I jest should," he exclaimed—then added sadly—"But who'll take me into an office?"

"Well, I will, and I'll keep you there if you'll be a good lad and behave yourself," said Mr. Legros. "Eh! what?" for Ted had started forward his eyes flashing, his chest heaving, his face all in a flame.

"Sir—you will—" he gasped—"I—I—can't think of aught to say—but—but I'll work—and—and—I'll try, and if I don't please you, sir—I——"

"There—there—I see you would like it." said the rich City man raising his hand. He felt suspiciously full about the throat and Effie had turned away to hide the tears

in her eyes. "Tell me—what is the most you have ever made in one week at this crossing."

"Fifteen shillin's, sir," Ted replied—he had recovered himself a little but he was still trembling violently—"but I 'aven't made that often—two or three times mebbe."

"I will give you fifteen shillings a week," said Mr. Legros in his cool, measured tones, tones which contrasted strangely with the boy's feverish excitement—"not because I give all messenger-boys so much, but because you are carrying a heavy load on your shoulders in having provided so bravely for your little sister. You have done very well indeed so far. But it won't do for the other lads in the office to know that I have favored you so much—and you understand that I shall not favor you in your work in any way. Eight shillings a week will be paid to you with the others—the other seven you can call here for and Jackson will give it to you. Do you understand?"

"I do, sir—thank—you, sir," Ted replied.

"Can you keep a secret?" Mr. Legros asked next.

"That I can, sir—" said Ted earnestly.

"Then I rely upon you not to say a word of what has happened this morning at the office—and that you will not speak of Miss Staunton there."

"You may rely on me, sir," said Ted, unconsciously making use of Mr. Legros' rather formal phraseology—"An' if I ever tells a single word," suddenly relapsing into his familiar speech again—"may Gord strike me——"

"Hush—hush—hush!" said Mr. Legros imperatively, "you must forget all that sort of thing now, and set yourself to improve your mind and educate yourself. Now you may go—I have no doubt Miss Staunton will arrange to provide for the little girl till she is well, then I suppose she will go back to school again. As for you, a night-school is the best thing you can do in the beginning—quite the best thing. Now, go—you can come to the

office on Monday morning at eight o'clock. I will put down the address and the best way to get there."

He waved the boy away, and Ted, with another passionate outburst of delighted thanks, got himself away.

"I hope, my dear Effie," said Mr. Legros, "that you are now satisfied."

"Are you, Guardy?"

"You should never answer one question by asking another," he returned—"it's the height of bad manners. As a matter of fact, however, I'm not ill-pleased with the boy—he is sharp and intelligent enough! It will depend on the night-school whether he ever becomes my partner and eventually head of the house or not," and then in his own stately way he betook himself out of the room and the house.

Effie went into her own little room and sat down before the fire with the morning paper in her hand. But she did not read it. On the contrary, she sat looking into the fire and thinking how wonderfully

everything had come about just as she most wished, and thinking, too, how happy and how lucky she was.

"Dear old Guardy was in a lovely mood this morning," she said to herself—"Yes, and last night too. Really it was good of him to do just what I asked, the dear old thing. I can't think how Mrs. Legros could have had the heart to bully him as she did—dear old Guardy."

And then she began to think about Austin Beaufort and the conversation which Barker had unwittingly interrupted. How angry and disgusted Austin had been, how he had gradually been smoothed into complaisance by the game-pie, and how they had both laughed and laughed over it.

"He's awfully afraid of Guardy," she said in her own mind—"he thinks Guardy would order him out of the house if he spoke to him about me, or something of that kind. As if dear old Guardy would —so absurd. Well—well—it was a pity Barker came in just then, but I'm not going

to worry about it—it will all come right in the end, and, after all, there's no need to hurry."

But if she did not worry a good deal during the next few days, she yet thought a good deal about Beaufort, for she did not see him at all and that was a very unusual thing. She never so much as caught a glimpse of him but she did not worry, because she remembered that he had distinctly promised that he would go to an afternoon party at a certain Lady Incledon's on the following day. She remembered, too, that he had not told her of any other engagements for that week. Perhaps he was very busy—all City houses had great pressure at times, and Effie knew enough of the City for that.

"I'll look at the paper," she said on the fifth morning after the pilgrimage to Hammersmith. "Why should I think such an awful lot about Mr. Beaufort? It's absurd. I won't do it. I really will read the paper—Oh! Lady Julia Scattercash

has got another baby—fancy! And poor old Colonel Travers is dead—think of that, now! I wonder what else there is in the paper—Illness of the Austrian Ambassador —and what's that? 'We regret to learn that the well-known house of Barking, Pottington and Co. stopped payment at two o'clock yesterday afternoon.'"

"Now what—" said Effie Staunton aloud —"do I know about the firm of Barking, Pottington and Co.?"

CHAPTER VII.

BEAUFORT THINKS.

ALTHOUGH Miss Staunton could not remember when and where she had heard of the firm of Barking, Pottington and Co., that old-established house was, as a matter of fact, more intimately connected with her than she had any idea of, for it was that from which Austin Beaufort derived his income of two hundred and fifty pounds a year.

The crash was a sudden one, and came about in one of those disastrous commercial crises when some great house, which has been for many a year the sturdy trunk around which a number of lesser houses have twined their branches, suddenly collapses, and tottering, falls, carrying with it all or most of the houses with which it has had business relations.

So in this case. The great banking-house of Denham, whose name had been, since the memory of living man, considered as safe as the Bank of England, whose seniors had been made peers and whose juniors were looked upon as among the most eligible matrimonial matches of the day, suddenly failed to meet their engagements, and a general panic among their clientele was the result.

Perhaps the largest house which had been closely connected with them was that of Barking, Pottington and Co., a firm of highly respectable stockbrokers, who had, a week previously, been thought safe for any amount.

In the outside world the fact of their failure did not make much stir, being, so to speak, lost in the Denham crash. Of course their own clients were more or less affected, while to their staff the whole affair fell like a huge thunder-clap.

For nobody excepting the heads of the firm had had the very smallest inkling that

the house was in any danger ; then suddenly and almost without warning, there came an end of everything.

To our poor friend Austin Beaufort it was as the death-blow of all his hopes, those frail flowers which had never yet dared to bloom and rejoice in blooming, but had now and then put forth a tiny flower of hope, a tiny leaf or bud only to be nipped by the frost of wealth and come to an untimely end.

He felt—when he had fully realized how utter and complete the ruin was—that now he could no longer even in his own heart aspire for an instant to the hand of a young lady who was reputed to be worth half a million of money. He knew—nobody better—how very difficult it would be for him to find another berth, for the times were bad, and men, good men too, were walking about with their hands in their pockets, hard up alike for a guinea and a chance of earning one.

As soon as the first crash was announced

fully half of the staff of Barking, Pottington and Co. received an intimation that their services were no longer needed and that they were at liberty to look out for other employment. And Beaufort knew that even if he were ever so lucky, he might only light upon something worth half his former position, and how in the name of reason, he asked himself, could he present himself to Mr. Legros as a suitor for Miss Staunton on a salary of perhaps three pounds a week?

In the first flush of his trouble he gave up all idea of going to Lady Incledon's musical afternoon, although he had learned from Effie that she was going there and had promised himself the pleasure of going also. Now he felt that the only honorable thing he could do would be to go away without saying a word about it, so that she should feel herself quite free from any implied tie to him. But as the hour passed by and the first bitterness of the blow began to wear away, he began to feel that he could not,

would not pass out of that world in which he had lived his life, that world which to him was life itself, without once more seeing the girl he loved.

Yes, he would go to this last gathering of his friends, and this pleasant South Kensington society festivity should be the scene of his silent farewell to a delightful life. After that should come the deluge, and he would quietly and without any explanation or fuss, sink out of sight like one who has no longer heart or strength to battle with the stormy billows of adversity.

He sighed to think of it and yet—yet, who would miss him? Effie for one, yes, he felt pretty sure that Effie would miss him, that she would look for him among the crowd of her admirers, that she would miss him among her partners and—and—well, it would not do to think too much about that. He would have plenty of time to think while he was in hiding.

And then he naturally began to think a

little about the future! He was not anxious about it or about himself, indeed he looked forward to the time to come with complete indifference. What might become of him was of so much less importance just then than the great and overwhelming fact that it was now a certainty that Effie Staunton was not for him.

Of course, he knew that he must decide on some definite course of action and at once. He could not hang about London at a loose-end, for London was an expensive place to live in and he was practically without means. Nor did he feel inclined to go home and throw himself upon his father's hospitality. He had been used naturally enough to spending his holidays at home, and he had always managed to put by a few pounds with which to help to make his visit bright and pleasant to the others. There were so many of them in the modest country vicarage, where the position was so much better than the income on which it had to be kept up, and it had always been

one of Beaufort's greatest pleasures to be able to make life a little smoother for them, to give Emmie a new tennis racket, Dolly a new set of colors for her paint-box, Jack a cricket bat, the dear old parson that special edition of Shakespere for which he had been pining for years past, and to the mother those varied odds and ends for which the hearts of all housewives yearn at times, while for the younger ones, Austin's pockets had seemed to rain sweeties and new toys. It had not cost him much in the way of sacrifice but his little gifts had made all the difference at home ; and he felt that he simply could not face the blank disappointment of the dear little faces did he go home without the power of doing as he had always done in the past.

So he neither could nor would go home, and he would not stop in London ; what then must he do ? What then could he do ? Well, there was always one line open to an able-bodied young man of good education, a line which required neither cap-

ital nor any special training—he could enlist.

He knew a good deal of a soldiering life, that is to say he knew a good deal of the rosy and pleasant side of it. He had lived in the vicinity of a cavalry barrack and had grown used to seeing big strapping fellows in their smart uniforms passing to and fro. He had noticed them on duty as he went in and out of the barrack gates on his way to see officers with whom he was acquainted, and it had seemed a jolly enough life to him. The work seemed nothing particular —any fellow with his wits about him could clean a horse and so on, and although of course doing 'sentry-go' would be a bit of a bore, still, life, as he ruefully reminded himself was not all beer and skittles, at least not for everybody; and he must learn, as best he could, to take the rough with the smooth and make the most of the situation in which he found himself.

Yes, he would go quietly away out of sight and without a word, excepting a letter

of explanation to his mother, begging her not to be in the least uneasy about him, and then he would enlist in a home-regiment and—and—well, it was no use troubling about what might happen after that, he would be able to keep body and soul together and he supposed in a couple of years he would get a commission and then it would be time enough to decide what he should finally do with himself for the rest of his life.

But he must see Effie again, yes, that he had promised himself. Not that he meant to tell her a single word of what had happened to him, not one single word. He would spend the afternoon in her company and have a thoroughly good time all round, he would take in enough of her sweetness and charm to last him for all time and after that—well, what did that matter? He got up and rang the bell.

"Is Mrs. Tasker at home?" he asked of the maid who answered the summons.

"Yes, sir; she is," she replied.

"Then ask her to come up here," he said. "I want to speak to her."

The maid went down and told her mistress that Mr. Beaufort wanted to speak to her—"Something 'ave happened to Mr. Beaufort," she added.

"Something happened," said the lady of the house sharply. "How d' you know?"

"It's plainly writ on his face," returned the maid promptly. "I—I shouldn't be a bit surprised if he was to do away with 'isself—he looks awful."

Thus half-scared out of her senses, Mrs. Tasker went up to Beaufort's room—the dining-room.

"Is anything the matter, Mr. Beaufort?" she asked in a quivering voice.

"Yes, Mrs. Tasker, something is very much the matter," he replied—"I may as well tell you right away without beating about the bush. It's just this—Barking, Pottington & Co. have smashed up, and I, of course, am smashed up with them."

"You're ruined," she cried aghast.

"Ruined—stone broke, Mrs. Tasker," he answered—"so utterly broke that I couldn't anyhow be any brokier. Well—we've got on very well together, you and I, for the past three years, but now you'll have to look out for another man to take these rooms, for my means won't run to it any longer. I'll pay up to the end of the week, of course, and I'll give you a letter of recommendation if it will be of any use to you."

"And *you?*" broke in the landlady in an awed voice.

"I—oh! I shall be all right, thanks," with a laugh.

"But—Mr. Beaufort—sir—you—you won't do anything rash," cried the landlady, in a piteous voice—"You won't make away with yourself or anything of that kind? Oh! sir——"

"Mrs. Tasker," said Beaufort, speaking with quiet decision—"have you taken leave of your senses or do you only think that I've done so? I've lived in your house

for three years—do you think I'm the sort of man to make away with myself, eh? What good would that do?"

"Oh! Mr. Beaufort," cried the good lady, sobbing—"forgive me—but Hannah frightened me, she said you looked awful. And I was afraid—I was afraid. Young people ain't like the old—we get patient and we get to bear things as we get older, but with young folks they often thinks there's only one way out of a difficulty, to cut it short and 'ave done with it. Don't do anything in a hurry, Mr. Beaufort, take time to think it out—do now."

She was elderly and fat and rather untidy in her attire, but she had a kind heart this good woman who let lodgings to young men, and she had taken his hand in both of hers and was sobbing over it.

"Why, Mrs. Tasker," he cried touched almost to tears by this unexpected kindness—"you are very kind to me. But don't be a bit afraid. I shall have to start afresh again, and that's a nuisance, but I

shall get on all right after a time, never fear. The only thing is that I must leave you—it may be years before I can afford these rooms again."

"Don't go," cried the landlady, tearfully —"take time to think of it, Mr. Beaufort. Pay me what you can and let the rest remain until you can pay me."

"No—I'm not going to begin my new start by running up a debt with a widow," he said, decidedly. "But I shall never forget that you made me that generous offer, never all my life, Mrs. Tasker, I promise you."

"It's not a one-sided offer, Mr. Beaufort," she urged, "you don't know what you've done for me, sir. Ten years was I struggling from pillar to post after my poor husband died, and never a turn of luck did I 'ave until you came and took these rooms. I've never had my rooms empty for a whole week since. *You* brought me good luck, Mr. Beaufort, and 'ave saved me many a disagreeable bit of business since."

"How ?" in surprise.

"Like this. Here's a gentleman 'ad the dining-rooms for over three years ! Well—suppose I have a party in the drawing-room that's inclined to cheat me. Well, it's ten chances to one they don't try it on when there's a lodger of three years' standing in the 'ouse, specially a lodger that goes out in evening clothes and shiny boots every night. A lodger of a certain class makes an 'ouse respectable, Mr. Beaufort, and it will be a great trouble to me if you leave me—it will indeed."

"Mrs. Tasker," said Beaufort, speaking very kindly, "if it were anyhow possible I wouldn't leave you at all. I have been perfectly comfortable ; you've looked after me as well as my own mother could have done, but I'm not going to stop in London at all. The times are bad. I never thought of this sort of thing happening and I didn't put by for a rainy day as I might have done; no, hang it, as I *ought* to have done. I might hang about for a few weeks or a few

months even and let you in for a dead loss, and get all the time shabbier and shabbier until I got so seedy none of my friends would care to be seen speaking to me ; and even then I might not succeed in getting a berth I could live out of. No, Mrs. Tasker, it's awfully kind of you, but I simply cannot do it. And I've made up my mind what to do —I'm going to enlist."

The landlady uttered a shrill yell of horror, and subsiding into a chair, threw a dingy black apron over her face and wailed behind it. Beaufort almost laughed aloud in spite of the tears so very near to his eyes. "There—there—" he said, patting her gingerly on the shoulder, "don't be so distressed about it—I shall get on well enough."

But Mrs. Tasker was not to be comforted. "'List for a soldier," she sobbed—"oh ! my dear young gentleman, don't—don't you go for to do it. What matter if you'd run me up a few pounds—*I* don't mind. But to think of you going for a soldier and

having no tails to your coat and—and—to eat off a tin plate and having your 'air cropped——"

Beaufort could help it no longer, he burst out laughing and laughed long and loudly —"My dear old friend—" he cried, "you have mixed it up with going to prison."

"It's about the same thing in the end," sobbed Mrs. Tasker wildly.

CHAPTER VIII.

DISAPPOINTMENT!

THE interview with his landlady had put Beaufort into quite good spirits and naturally enough, for when you have just experienced a shipwreck of all your fortunes, you have, also naturally enough, a general disposition to feel that the whole world has, to use a very modern phrase, "got its knife into you," and will therefore lose no possible chance of making you fully realize the fact. Already he had begun to feel that, although, as yet, none of his friends knew of his difficulties and troubles, to find such a spontaneous outburst of real help from one on whom he had no claim beyond that of expecting a fair return for the money he paid her, was like a ray of bright sunshine in the gloom of a November fog.

So he went off to the tea-party at which he knew that he would be sure to meet Effie, feeling more the fact that he was going to see her than that other terrible one that, after to-day, he would probably never see her again.

And she was looking so charming! Beaufort had never seen her in that particular dress before, and felt instinctively that it had been donned for his especial benefit. It was a pretty dress, of a dull blue with a great deal of braiding and an edging of black fur about it, that fine soft fur which they call Persian lamb. On her wavy hair she had a little cap to match the gown and her clear eyes were as blue as sapphires.

"It is you who are late this time," she said to him, with reproachful tones though there was a smile on her face.

The shadows fell back for a moment upon Beaufort's heart—"Yes—I am rather late," he said, looking down gravely into her smiling eyes—"I—I have been having a chat with my landlady—she kept me."

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"With your landlady"—in surprise—"Oh!—and," in a slightly offended tone—"is she a very interesting person?"

"Not generally at all interesting," returned Beaufort in a very matter-of-fact tone—"but she happened to rather interest me to-day."

"Why?"

"Oh! for no reason."

"What were you talking to her about?"

As a matter-of-fact, Effie did not in the least want to know what he had been talking to his landlady about, and only asked the question from sheer nervousness. Somehow, she had never known before what it was to feel nervous in Beaufort's presence, but now the cloud which hung over him insensibly affected her.

"What was I talking to her about? Oh! only about her rooms and so on. She is not the kind of woman one would feel inclined to talk to on general subjects. She's very stout and elderly, and rather a

snuffy kind of person, but kind, very kind."

Effie softened. "Is she kind to you? Oh! I daresay she's quite a dear old thing —I believe some landladies are. I'm sure sometimes when I used to go to the seaside with my governess, when Mr. and Mrs. Legros were abroad, we used to have awfully kind landladies—there was positively nothing they wouldn't do to oblige us."

"Suppose," said Beaufort, who was beginning to feel happier now that he found himself in her presence, "suppose that we go down and give each other some tea; that would be very kind of us—eh? Or"—with a sudden access of that suspicious tone which had already found a home in his heart—"perhaps you have already been down to tea?"

"No," said Effie in a low voice—"I waited."

"For me?" exclaimed Beaufort in an ecstasy.

He ought not to have said it—he had

fully and deliberately made up his mind that he could not ask this girl to marry him, or rather that he could not summon up enough assurance to face her guardian, and that being so, he ought not to have drawn her on to betraying her feelings towards him. But the words slipped out, two little simple-sounding words conveying so much—"For *me?*" And Effie all unknowing of the barrier which had risen up between them answered them frankly and openly enough.

"Yes, I did wait for—you," she said, blushing a little, and yet speaking with quiet boldness. "I thought you would come and I knew you—you would——"

"Would want to take you down to tea," he finished for her—"and so I do—you were right. I should have been fearfully disappointed if you had gone down with anyone else. I think I should have—*cried!*"

Effie laughed softly at the idea of seeing him crying with disappointment and Beau-

fort pulled himself together, remembering that she was in ignorance of all that had happened, remembering also, that he wished, as yet, to keep her in that ignorance.

"But you might not have come at all," she said, smiling; she was very happy now that he had come, and was more than half inclined to tease him a little.

"But you knew that I should come," he returned.

"Well, but you might not have come, and —and—if you hadn't, where should I have been if I had waited much longer?" she asked.

"Miss Staunton—Effie—" he said—"supposing that I had not come—you would have understood, wouldn't you, that something serious had happened to keep me away? You would have believed that I had not been able to help myself—you would have believed that I would always have *wanted* to come, wouldn't you?"

"I don't know," she answered—"I suppose so, but——"

"But supposing—" he went on earnestly —"supposing that I had to go away, that I had to stop away because, oh, because circumstances were too hard for me—you would never believe that I had gone from choice—you would understand that I—oh! pray pardon me," he broke off with a sudden change of tone as a lady in passing stumbled against his foot. "I do hope I did not hurt you—how careless of me to have my foot out like that."

"No matter," said the lady—"you did not really hurt me—why—Effie, my dear, I have not seen you for ages. Is it really you?"

Effie got up from her seat—she was rather pale and was trembling a little though she scarcely knew why, and Beaufort was as white as death. The most casual observer might have noticed that these two young people were engrossed in a conversation, as serious to them as the issues of life and death; but this lady was not observant and she saw nothing. She

never noticed the quiver in Effie's tones as she answered her questions, she never saw the white agony of an everlasting farewell upon Beaufort's face, and she stood and talked, and talked, and talked until Effie could have shrieked out with pain caused by what she knew not, and Beaufort grew cold and rigid as hope slowly sank in his heart and died at last. Yes, died; for before Effie was released from enduring the fierce fire of questions, he saw, to his intense surprise, Effie's guardian come into the room.

He looked so astonished to see Mr. Legros at an afternoon party that Effie's eyes followed his and she answered the question that they asked. "Yes, but he is a great friend of Lady Incledon's—he always goes to her parties."

Already Mr. Legros had seen them and he crossed the room to speak to Effie. "Ah! how are you?" he said in friendly tones to Beaufort—"I'm afraid I have not paid Lady Incledon much compliment—it's

nearly seven now, and I have only been here twenty minutes or so. Well—well, I could not get away any earlier. And now, I suppose, it's time to go home."

"Yes, quite time," said Effie, who was oppressed by a sense of disappointment, she hardly knew how or why.

"Then we will be going. Good-night, Beaufort. By the by, can you dine with us on Tuesday? I have a couple of old business fogies dining with me, and they are dull company for Effie here."

"It's awfully good of you to ask me, sir," said Beaufort, hesitatingly, "but I'm going away to-morrow."

"Oh! are you? For long?" Mr. Legros put into plain words what Effie's eyes were already asking.

"For—a few—days," Beaufort answered with an effort.

"Ah! some other time then! Good-night," heartily.

"Good-night," said Effie.

"Good-bye," said Beaufort, pressing her hand hard—"good——bye!"

Effie did not speak again until they had driven away from the house; then her guardian broke the silence.

"I like that young fellow," he said, in his even, deliberate tones. "There's something straightforward and honest about him. I wonder what he is going to do now?"

"To do?" echoed the girl.

"Yes! Wasn't he with Barking, Pottington and Co.? To be sure he was. Well, they're done for, so I suppose he'll have to look out for another berth."

But Effie never answered! In one moment she had realized all, had realized that Beaufort's good-bye had been not for a few days but forever. She neither fainted nor cried out, she only turned very cold as if her heart was chilled; her guardian, noticing her unusual silence, turned and looked at her.

"Are you not well, Effie?" he asked, kindly.

"Oh! yes, Guardy," she answered, mechanically, while in very truth her heart seemed to have turned to water within her.

CHAPTER IX.

HOPE DEFERRED.

A FEW days went by and Effie Staunton began eagerly to look out for Beaufort's re-appearance in that part of society which had constituted their world, their mutual world. But although the days wore into weeks, and the weeks into months, still he did not come back, and for any sign he made of his existence, he might have been dead and buried. To poor Effie, as one day after another crept by, life seemed to have lost its savor entirely, and as the dreary fogs and bitter cold of winter gave place to the sharp keen air of spring she gradually gave up one amusement after another, until at last she only fulfilled those few engagements which necessitated her and her guardian going out together.

At first—that is while she was still expecting Beaufort to come back again—she went everywhere, to all the houses where he and she had used to meet and spend lonely hours on dim stairways or in secluded conservatories. Each time she drove up to such a house it was with a hope smiling in her heart and in her eyes, that he would surely be there—each time she drove away, tired and hopeless, her pretty blue eyes dark and dim with unshed tears. For he never came, and, at last, all her hope died and she gave up going into those scenes of gayety, which she had, so short a time ago, enjoyed so much.

But though she gave up in a great measure that part of the world, making one little excuse after another both to the ladies who gave the parties and to her guardian, who repeatedly urged her to go to them, she did not turn her back upon the child at 208 Denver Street, Hammersmith.

"You ought not to go continually to see that child," her guardian said seriously one

day, when he had by a string of questions elicited the fact that she had been to see Nelly Brown that afternoon. "Yes, I know the child is delicate, yet I cannot get out in these east winds, and I know that she likes you to go often—of course she does, any child would under the circumstances—any one would. But that's not quite the question. You have never been really well since you first went there, and I feel very seriously that I am wrong to allow you to do it."

Effie leant over his chair and rested her cheek against his temple for a moment. "Dear old guardy," she said, affectionately —"indeed I am quite, quite well. There is *nothing* the matter with me, nothing. And you will make me very unhappy if you prevent my going to see this poor child, and you will break her heart, really you will."

"I shall make you unhappy," Mr. Legros repeated looking searchingly at her—"and are you happy now? Answer me that."

Effie hesitated for a moment—"I'm not as happy as I might be," she said bravely —"but it has nothing to do with my health. Don't watch me, don't take any notice of me, guardy. I shall get over it by and by."

Mr. Legros looked at her in astonishment —"Why, Effie, my dear," he said—"what has gone wrong with you? Can I——"

"No, my dear old guardy," she answered —"you can't help me a bit, except by letting me alone and leaving me to recover myself in my own way. Only don't stop me from going to see little Nelly; it is one of the comforts of my life."

Mr. Legros nodded and nodded with a wise air such as most men assume when they are utterly puzzled—"well, you must have your own way, I suppose," he said, kindly enough.

He did not understand the situation in the least, but he wanted to be kind to his ward. He sometimes realized, dimly it is true, but still, in a way, he realized that the girl was not living a healthy life; not the

kind of life which a young girl of eighteen ought to live. He sometimes felt that, after all, he was not her father, and that none but a father could have that true sympathy which every young girl ought to have; while, under no circumstances, could he or any one else supply the place of her lost mother. Brothers and sisters she had none, had never had any in truth; nay, she was even without a single cousin, and except for her guardian, who was no relation to her whatever, she stood quite alone in the world.

Once or twice that day the man of business found himself wondering what could have happened to change his little ward so materially, to quench the light from her sweet eyes, to take some of the lovely wild-rose color from her cheeks, and check the once familiar laughter on her lips. He could not understand it. She said herself that she was well in body, she had everything in the wide world that she could wish for, money she had without stint, and

as Heaven knew, he denied her nothing that she wished to have or do. And yet she was evidently and unmistakably not happy; and he, poor man, did not know what he could do to alter the state of affairs; and he had known so little of Effie's intimacy with Beaufort that he never gave him so much as a thought.

Meantime Effie, left alone, went into her own sanctum and sat down before the fire, letting her hands fall idly in her lap while she gave herself up to the somewhat doubtful pleasure of a day-dream! And a day-dream meant that she was thinking about Austin Beaufort.

She thought a good deal about Austin Beaufort, as was natural enough. Her thoughts flew back over the past to the day when they had last met—that afternoon at Lady Incledon's when he had all but spoken out and that horrid Mrs. Effrench had kept her talking about nothing—at least about nothing that she wanted to hear—and so the golden moment had gone by and might,

nay, probably would, never come back again.

For poor Effie's heart was torn in twain, on the one hand by a feeling of certainty that Austin Beaufort had cared for her at that time, on the other by a feeling of uncertainty that he cared for her now. One moment she was ready to assure herself that the words he had said, the love he had looked, the tenderness he had expressed by his tones, his actions, could not but be part and parcel of that real love which comes to us here below so very seldom during all the course of our longest lives; the next she was equally convinced that if he had *really* loved her he could not for *any* reason have blotted himself so completely out of her existence as he had done.

"I suppose it was the money," she said to herself disconsolately on that bright spring morning—"as if the money would have made any difference to me. Oh!—*why* did Barking, Pottington & Co. go and get bankrupt? I wonder where he is

now? I wonder where he went? I wonder if he ever thinks of me now?"

Now as a matter of fact at that very moment Austin Beaufort was very busily occupied with a bucket and a broom and was hard at work as if for dear life scrubbing away at a flight of stone steps which led to his quarters. It was not an elevating occupation, but it was his duty and he did it, laughing sometimes to himself as he thought what a sensation his appearance and work would make in the set which knew him best in town.

But Austin Beaufort, Private Austin, of the 150th King's Dragoons, was no skulker, he worked with a will and cleaned those steps admirably without ever a thought of sneering at the work because it was different from what he had been used to. And when he got to the very bottom—and it was a long flight, let me tell you—he straightened himself and looked at them approvingly.

"There's not much fault to find with

that, I think," he said to himself—"but, by Jove, how it does wake one's back up. I wonder what Effie would say if she could see me? I wonder if she ever thinks of me. God bless her. I hope she hasn't quite forgotten me, and if she does not—why, the harder I work now the sooner I shall get through the rough part of joining and get to my commission—and—then——" He broke off short, for the long pause meant that there was just a faint little ray of hope in his heart that perhaps, a few years hence, if Effie had not forgotten him and consoled herself with somebody else, there might be a possible if not very probable chance of winning her, after all. So Beaufort pulled himself out of his momentary day-dream and picked up his bucket that he might depart upon the business in that situation of life in which the failure of Messrs. Barking, Pottington & Co. had placed him.

But oh! cheerful as he was over it and manfully as he looked forward to a hopeful

future, Austin Beaufort had found his new life not wanting in trials of all sorts, in trials both small and great. The unaccustomed food, the heavy manual work, the poor quarters, the rough companionship, the feeling of being no longer in any degree his own master, even the difficulty of getting used to being treated by his officers as a mere machine, a block who must show feeling upon no subject whatever, and worst of all to a gentleman the impossibility of finding any friends of his own class out of barracks, all these affected him terribly at first. He soon got over the feeling that he had gone back to Eton jackets again and even to doing without pockets, and acquired the habit of shoving his handkerchief up his sleeve and his letters and money into his breast, but not in the least did he get over the feeling of loneliness which oppressed him at all times when he was free of duty.

And once when he had been about two months in the 150th he nearly boiled over

in a passion which might have brought about desperate consequences, for one afternoon during stables, he heard one officer say to another—"Private Austin seems a neat-handed sort of chap. I think I should like him for my servant." For a moment, all the blood in Private Austin's body seemed to have found its way to his face, and quickly let a sergeant, who had been standing by and who had overheard the remark also, into the secret of the fury of disgust which filled his heart.

The sergeant had heard the words with a pleasant sort of feeling that a well-behaved civil young chap who did his work without shirking and did not give himself airs in consequence thereof, was very deservedly attracting the attention of his officers. But the indignant flush on Private Austin's face and the equally starting pallor which quickly followed it, told him that the object of these remarks had not in any sense appreciated what he had regarded as a compliment.

He thought for a moment that Private Austin was going to blurt out an indignant refusal to be distinguised by being chosen as batman to one of his officers, and he laid his hand on his arm. "Don't say anything," he muttered—"I'll stop that happening."

"I wasn't going to say anything, thank you, sergeant," returned Austin in a choking voice—"but I'm immensely obliged to you all the same."

"Have you ever been to Cambridge?" the sergeant enquired—"to the University, I mean?"

"No—Oxford," answered Austin.

"H'm—Did you pass your examinations?"

"I took my B.A." replied Austin, smiling in spite of the angry disturbance in his heart—"if that's what you mean."

"Yes, that's it—" said the other, moving away.

Austin had a dim idea of what followed though he did not actually know that Ser-

geant Williams remarked a few days later in a casual kind of way to the officer who had spoken of him—"Private Austin's doing much better than gentlemen privates often do, sir—Oh! you didn't know he was a gentleman, sir? Yes, he's taken his B.A. at Oxford—Oh! yes!"

"Has he though?" exclaimed the officer in surprise, "I thought he was an uncommonly smart chap. By Jove, I very nearly chose him for my servant in Stubb's place" —and away he went laughing at his mistake and Private Austin went on scouring steps and doing sentry and all the other useful and tediously uninteresting occupations by which the rank and file of her Majesty's army are made fit for active service and—oddly enough as it seems on the face of it—into the smartest men in the kingdom.

CHAPTER X.

INTO THE PAST.

THE east winds, which had tried Nelly Brown's delicate chest so severely, were gone at last and twice Effie had been down to Denver Street with the victoria and had taken the child for a drive, need I say to the untold delight of that little person herself. And really Nelly did not look at all out of place in the smart and well-turned-out carriage. Effie had given her an entirely new outfit, a warm navy-blue serge frock, a dark blue frieze coat and a large hat of blue straw trimmed with velvet and ribbons in which the child, with her great blue eyes and little pale face, looked as interesting a little person as any young lady could wish to give a pleasure to.

"I feel rather nervous about your throat

and chest, Nelly," Miss Staunton said the second time she took her for a drive—" so I've brought a fur cape for you and you must wear it whenever it is cold enough."

" Dear lady," cried Nelly, in an ecstasy, touching the soft dark fur with reverent fingers.

It was nct a new thing, but one which Effie had worn herself a winter or two previously, so that it was large and ample for the child and kept her safe from the cold east wind. Not that it was cold then—indeed a bright sun was shining overhead in a sky of turquoise flecked with opal, a light breeze was blowing and all nature was brisk and smiling.

" Now where shall we go ? " Effie asked —" to Town or to Richmond to see the green trees and hear the birds singing."

" Oh ! to Richmond, lady," cried Nelly —" and right over the park. Ted, he took me once last summer—it was lovely."

" Yes, and it will be lovelier to-day because you won't be tired when you get

there," Effie answered, as she tucked the warm rug about the child—"and coming back, we'll stop at the shop and get some angel-cakes—no—no—maids-of-honor, that's it, is it not?"

But "maids-of-honor" were beyond Nelly's comprehension. "Are they to eat?" she asked in an awed tone—"I thought maids-of-honor was ladies."

Effie laughed merrily, somehow she more often laughed for the child than for any one else. "Maids-of-honor are very delicious cheese-cakes," she said; "and we will buy a box-full and some cakes and I will go back and have tea with you."

The child flushed scarlet with pleasure—"Oh! lady, my dear lady," she cried—and then human nature asserted itself and she murmured—"I wonder what they'd think at school if they knew I was having a lady like you to tea?" at which Effie laughed again, and pointed out a pretty kitten lying on the sunny window-sill of a house they were passing.

They had a long drive that day and it fed Effie Staunton's weary heart like balm of Gilead to see the delight and rapture with which the child, who had passed her life in a back street in Hammersmith, noticed every tree and flower, every bird and horse and cat and dog that they saw. And on their way home they called at the shop where they sell maids-of-honor and Nelly chose what cakes she most liked the look of for tea.

They found that the landlady had given an eye to the fire, and if the truth be told she had tidied up the room on the chance of Miss Staunton's going in with Nelly when she brought her home. So the neat little place looked very cosy and comfortable and moreover Ted was there already, having got away from the office half an hour earlier than usual.

He had not been more than three months at his new occupation and the improvement in the lad was marvellous. For the regular work and hours already had begun to show

their effect, and he had gone to his night-school duly and truly, never missing a single night that the school was open. He had grown too and had plainly benefited by his new life, for he looked well-fed and hearty and his speech was already softened and relieved of much of the cockney accent which had been second nature to him three months ago.

He jumped up when Effie and the child came in, and pushed aside the copy on which he was at work.

"Good afternoon, Miss Staunton," he said respectfully, yet with no more sign of cringing than he had had when he owned a crossing and had won his way by his brisk fearlessness of speech and manner.

"Well, Ted, we have had a drive in Richmond Park," said Effie—"and it was lovely—wasn't it, Nelly?"

"Oh—it was like 'eaven," sighed Nelly, rapturously.

"Heaven," corrected Ted, whose fondest but most secret ambition was to acquire

the slow refined accents in which Mr. Legros spoke—" and I hope you thanked Miss Staunton, Nelly."

"I don't believe as 'ow I did," answered the child looking with penitent eyes at her dear lady.

Effie was thoroughly astonished. She had not seen the boy for about six weeks, as she had always gone to see Nelly early in the afternoon, and this change of speech was startling. His first appearance had been a surprise, but this new surprise was almost a shock. Yet a shock that she was glad to realize, for it told her better than any words could have done that the boy was worth helping, that the seed had not fallen upon stony ground. "Don't worry about that, Ted," she said, kindly, "her eyes have been thanking me all the time. And I have come to have some tea. We have brought some cakes home with us. I see your kettle is boiling "—yes, she really did say that, my critical reader—" so we can have it at

once. I can't keep the horse out very long."

Ted began to bustle about in a mighty hurry. "I won't be five minutes getting it, ma'am," he declared, and in his extreme hurry forgetting his newly acquired English —"now Nell, you be a-getting of the cups while I mashes the tea—where's the cloth? Oh! 'ere it is, an' as clean as a new pin. There ye are."

He worked with such a will that in about five minutes the tea was made and everything neatly spread out on the little table, and with such pride as I can scarce describe, he gravely poured out the first cup for the young lady, who had so greatly honored them. And Effie, who was very hungry after her long drive, made a very good tea, and the tea-cakes and maids-of-honor disappeared among them at a quite alarming rate.

"And now tell me, Ted," said Effie, when they had satisfied the first sharp pangs of

hunger—"Tell me how do you like your new work?"

"I like it better every day, miss," Ted said, promptly.

"And you never regret the crossing?"

"Never," equally promptly.

"Do you know there is a new crossing-sweeper," she asked—"not a boy but a man with a lame foot? He came as soon as you left."

The boy blushed a little—"Well, you see, Miss Staunton, I was like to know because—because I sold him the goodwill of the crossin'."

"You sold it!" in great surprise.

"Why, yes, miss, of course I did. I'd paid for it myself, and I'd worked it up to what it was," he answered half apologetically.

"And how much did you sell it for?"

"For a sovereign, miss," he replied—"and I put it in the saving bank for a rainy day, or in case Nelly was ill again. And

we put something to it every week, don't we, Nelly ?"

"*You* do," answered Nelly, quickly, at which the boy laughed and reddened a little, and Effie Staunton felt quite a thrill of pride shoot through her heart, of pride, aye and of thankfulness too that this boy whom she had taken under her wing, had not proved unworthy of her trust.

"Well, I am glad you like the new life and the different kind of work," she said—"because it must be so much easier to do work that you really can take an interest in. And how do you get on at the night-school ?"

"Oh ! I'm gettin' on finely, miss," Ted cried brightly—"would you like to see my copy ?"

"Yes, Ted, I should," she said, kindly.

He fetched the copy on which he had been at work when they came in, and stood by with shy pride while Effie inspected the straggling letters which he had inscribed therein.

"Really, Ted, you are getting on very well," she exclaimed, "and the improvement is plainly marked on every page. You will do, my boy, you will get on—only work on for a time now, and all will come easily by and by. How do you get on with your reading?"

"Oh! it's much easier than it was, miss," he replied.

"Then I will lend you some books—good healthy boys' books, Robinson Crusoe and books like that. What books have you there, by the bye?"

"Not many interesting ones, miss," he answered—"at least they're too hard for the like o' me. But they was allus—I mean always—there in mother's time, and Nelly and me has never moved 'em."

Effie went over and looked at the little shelf with its row of books—"*The Bible*—Longfellow's Poems—ah! I must read some of those to you, Nelly, when I come again—Kingsley's *Westward Ho*—you'll like that when you get a little further on, Ted.

And *what's* that? Poems by the Lady Geraldine Beaufort—oh! I should like to read these. Will you lend them to me?"

"Why, of course, miss," cried Ted, quickly—"there's nothing Nelly an' me has as we wouldn't be proud to give you, eh, Nelly?"

"Aye, Ted," echoed Nelly, eagerly.

So Effie Staunton parted from them and drove back to Egerton Square, with the precious little volume in her hands. It was a very small and faded book, with a few dainty and rather weak thoughts expressed in verse, but *his* mother had written it and it was sacred therefore to the girl who loved him.

"I wonder now"—she mused—"how these children's mother came to possess it—who did it originally belong to? *Why——whats that?*

What was there on the first page of the shabby little book to make her call out aloud and stare at it with wide open eyes

as she was doing? Nothing apparently very unusual—only a man's name written in a bold, well-educated hand—the hand of a gentleman. That was all; and the man's name was, *Marmaduke Marchmont!*

CHAPTER XI.

AN IMPORTANT QUESTION.

Miss Staunton said nothing about the book inscribed with the name of Marmaduke Marchmont to her guardian or to any one else. She spent most of the evening reading the poems—if they could be called such—which had been written and published when Lady Geraldine Beaufort was very young and had not been long married. The book had not made a great stir in the world and had not indeed repaid either author or publisher for the trouble they had taken in bringing it into existence, and babies had come so thick and fast at the Vicarage that Lady Geraldine had had no time to perpetrate more verses, and no money with which to launch them upon the long-suffering public.

To Effie, however, they outshone all the poems she had ever read in all her life before—to her they brought a message as true and real as if it had come straight from Austin Beaufort himself, and she closed the little volume and let it fall on her lap and wondered whether if she were to write to Lady Geraldine for Austin's address whether she would be able to give it to her or not—able and willing; she must not forget that.

And then she began to think about Marmaduke Marchmont, and how a book with his name written in it could by any chance have got into the way of the children at 208 Denver Street? For Effie Staunton knew something, aye and rather more than something, about Marmaduke Marchmont.

"How can they have had anything to do with him?" her thoughts ran. "How well I remember him and how he was killed just before grandpapa died. I shall never forget the night that they brought him

into the Hall with his neck broken, never. Let me see it was more then eight years ago, for it was on my eleventh birthday. I remember it as well as if it were yesterday and Uncle Duke was a bit crusty with grandpapa. Uncle Duke had a temper, yes. And in the afternoon rather late he went out riding on 'Soldier,' and three hours afterwards they brought him back with his neck broken, and poor grandpapa never got over it, never.

"'You're all I have, Effie,' he said to me the next day, 'and it will make a great difference to you—a great difference. You must be a good girl and learn all you can —you'll need all the wit you've got and all you can acquire too.'

"Poor grandpapa, he never held up his head afterwards and I don't believe he went twice outside the house again. Poor dear old grandpapa!" she sighed, and then she added—"And I wonder *how* Uncle Duke's book happened to get into Denver Street?"

However, as conjecture would not help

her in any way, Effie continued to wait in patience until the following day, and when the next day came she possessed her soul as well as she could to wait until such time as Ted would be at home, for she did not hope to gather any information out of little Nelly.

And when she got to Denver Street, Ted was already gone off to his night-school.

"But not at six o'clock?"

"Yes, Miss Effie," explained the little girl—"Ted he goes off to his school at six on Wednesder nights, only on Wednesder nights, and then he gets 'ome earlier and we has a game at 'patience' till bedtime."

"I see," said Effie—"then he'll be in at what time?"

"About 'alf-past seven, Miss Effie," Nelly answered.

Effie had taught the child to call her so, and she also usually corrected her speech with much care, but to-day she did not seem to notice anything amiss with it.

"Well I must wait to see him another

time," she said. "By the bye, Nelly, did you ever know anyone called Marmaduke Marchmont?"

"No," answered the child, shaking her head.

"Ah! well, tell Ted I will come down about six o'clock to-morrow and he must wait for me if he can."

"Oh! he'll wait, Miss Effie," returned Nelly, confidently.

"It's rather silly of me to worry about it," Effie said to herself—"perhaps their mother picked it up at a second-hand book-stall, I shouldn't wonder at all if that is not the explanation to the mystery. Well, anyway, I must wait till to-morrow."

And on the following afternoon a little before six o'clock she drove down to Denver Street again and finding Ted at home she put her question to him without any preamble or beating about the bush.

"Ted," she said—"did you ever know anyone called Marmaduke Marchmont?"

"Yes, miss, I did," he answered.

"Then who was he?" she asked.

"He was my father," the boy answered, promptly.

"*Your father!*" she cried.

"Yes, miss, he was."

"But how could that be?" she exclaimed.

"Well, because he had married my mother," said the boy with simple logic.

"But your name is Brown," Effie cried.

"We've allus been *called* Brown," he corrected —"because they was married private, and my father he never durst let none of his people know what he'd done in marrying mother. Mother wasn't a lady, you know, miss, though a better, gooder angel didn't tread the earth. Just before Nelly was born, that must have been about eight years ago, rather more, father stopped coming home and he never came 'ome no more. Mother was broken-hearted over it and she fretted over it a deal for there wasn't a word came to say why nor nothing. And then after Nelly was born, mother took her in 'er arms and set out to find somethin' out

about him, and when she got to his own 'ome they told her he was dead, had been killed by a fall from 'is 'orse and had broke 'is neck; and they took and showed her his grave and the old gentleman's—he'd died the week before."

"And she really was married to him?" Effie said.

"Oh! yes, miss, she allus said so."

"But why did not she write and tell his father about it?" Effie cried—"oh! he was dead before she knew that Marmaduke Marchmont was no longer alive and well. But why did she tell no one at the time?"

"Well, miss," Ted said, apologetically—"you see I was a little chap at the time, I didn't know very much about it, though mother as far back as I could remember used to tell me all about what had 'appened afore I was born—*be*-fore, I mean. And many's the time since that she's gone over it all again till I got to think that she fancied things and that we never really 'ad a father at all. And yet I can remember him right

enough, but I got to think that it was all fancy about his being a gentleman an' all that."

"But how was it she did not tell the family at the time?" Effie persisted.

"Well, I believe she did—she saw a lawyer I know," he replied—"I think he told her there wasn't a chance of a penny for 'er, and that all the old gentleman's money was left to a little girl, 'cause mother used to cry about it and say t'was so 'ard all should be left to one and the others left out in the cold; but lor, I was only a little chap, miss, it didn't make much difference to me. It all went in at one ear and out at t'other."

"But she did see a lawyer?" Effie asked.

"Oh! yes, that she surely did, she's told me so 'undreds of times—but if the money was all left to someone else and a little girl too, what was the good o' bothering any more about it—There was nothing to get, so mother just dropped it."

"I must talk to Mr. Legros about it,"

said Effie decidedly, "and now it is time I was going home. I'll see what Mr. Legros says—and if Marmaduke Marchmont was really your father, you and Nelly must be properly provided for. Anyway I will do my best for you."

She did not remember until she had got nearly to Egerton Square that she had not told them that she was the little girl to whom old Mr. Marchmont had left every penny of which he died possessed.

"Why, I am actually first cousin to those children, own cousin," she said, and then she laughed softly to herself—"Fancy being own cousin to a crossing-sweeper—*What* a funny world it is."

She found that Mr. Legros had just returned to the house when she entered it and she went straight into the library where he usually sat during the half-hour before dinner. As a rule Effie was very wise and circumspect with her guardian, never telling him anything the least unpleasant until he had been warmed into a genial mood by a

good dinner. But on this occasion, she never gave harmless diplomacy a thought, she blurted out her news without an instant's preamble.

"Oh! guardy, such an extraordinary thing has happened! What do you think? The children in Denver Street, Ted and Nelly, are my own cousins, my own, my first cousins."

Mr. Legros sprang to his feet and stared at his ward with stern eyes of astonishment as if she had indeed taken leave of her senses—"What folly is this?" he said.

"No folly at all, dear guardy, it's the sober, serious truth," she answered.

"I knew that boy would impose on you," —he began, but Effie burst into a peal of laughter.

"But he doesn't know it himself yet; they haven't the very smallest suspicion of anything of the kind. And it all came out in the very simplest way possible, and I don't really think that there can be the least doubt

on the subject. But sit down, guardy, and I'll tell you *all* about it."

"Stop—stop," he said. "You come in and take my breath away just before dinner, and upset my nerves and put me all of a shake and then want to begin an interminably long story. You must just wait, young lady, and let me get a cigarette lighted, or else don't expect me to listen to this wonderful story with ordinary patience."

But the story, wonderful as it really was, was soon told and Effie fetched a little book of verses and showed him her uncle's name written on the first page. "You see the story all tallies so well," she ended, "for Ted knew his father's name, remembers him, knew they were married what he calls 'private,' and that his mother actually set off with a young baby in her arms to try to get news of her husband. And that was just one week after poor dear grandpapa was buried. And grandpapa died and never knew that Uncle Duke was married at all,

and that there was a Marchmont boy living all the time."

"All the better for you," put in Mr. Legros.

"Yes, but if grandpapa had lived he would never have left Uncle Duke's boy to sweep a crossing, would he?"

"I can't say. His money was all absolutely his own, he could do what he liked with it. Besides you have got to make sure that this boy's mother really was Marmaduke Marchmont's wife."

"There is no reasonable doubt that he was their father," Effie cried—"and I am sure grandpapa would not in any case have left his son's son to sweep a crossing. I am sure he would have provided for them properly, handsomely. And I shall do what he would have done—I made up my mind to that in an instant."

"Hoity-toity," cried Mr. Legros smiling —"then why did you come and tell me all about it if you made up your mind from the first?"

"Guardy, you wouldn't have liked me *not* to tell you, would you?" the girl said, reproachfully—"would you now? No, I thought not," as he smiled at her. "I only want to do what is just and right. Grandpapa was the justest of men and I want to do what he would have done. And when I come into my own right, I shall give these children half of what grandpapa left me."

"My dear," cried her guardian in positive dismay, "this is simply quixotic."

"I suppose strict justice often is," said Effie, simply, "but I know that I shall be happier all my life for it and I shouldn't really enjoy a single fraction that I kept back because of my legal right. And I shall never be able to make up to that poor dead woman for all that she suffered during her sad years of poverty and loneliness. I can never make up to her for that."

Her tone was very sad and full of regret, and Mr. Legros drew her quite close to him. "My dear good, generous, unselfish little girl," he said—"believe me, when you went

down to Hammersmith that foggy winter night and saved a dying child's life, you repaid that child's mother, even though she was dead and gone, for all that you had innocently owed her in the past. Set your mind perfectly at rest on that point, now and for always.'

CHAPTER XII.

DOUBT.

MR. LEGROS lost no time in seeing the lawyer who had been Mr. Marchmont's legal adviser and had made the will by which Effie Staunton inherited the whole of his property.

"Yes," the lawyer said—"now I come to remember it there was a person who gave out hints of having been Marmaduke Marchmont's wife. I didn't see her myself but I believe Crickett, my head clerk, did."

"And how was it that *I* heard nothing about it?" Mr. Legros asked vexedly.

"My dear sir, not from any intentional wish to keep it back, I assure you. But,

if you remember, we had the election on here at the time and we were all harassed to death. I never gave it another thought; it was hardly likely I should, for we lawyers are used to that sort of claimant appearing, well, scarcely a claimant, for this woman did not get so far as that. Then it would have been no good her claiming anything, for all was left to the granddaughter and she was a minor with no power to make any fresh arrangements. Crickett told the woman so, and she evidently saw the force of the argument for she let the matter drop and we heard no more of her."

For once in his life, Mr. Legros, the cool-headed even-tempered man of business, almost got into a rage. "But you don't suppose that *I* would have let my old friend's grandchildren starve for the sake of a pound or two a week, do you?" he said. "That I would have let Marmaduke Marchmont's boy sweep a crossing and taken him on as messenger-boy in my office, out of charity, do you?"

"My dear sir," said the man of law dryly —"I never saw you until I met you at John Marchmont's funeral, and, I must confess, neither your face nor your manner would have led me to believe that you were a man of impulsive, not to say quixotic tendencies. Don't think me rude, but really I never should have thought of your providing for this unknown woman. Still, at the same time, if it had not slipped my mind, I should have told you of her existence, as a matter of course. Even then we might have been no better off—a person of that position does not usually take in a daily paper, and we might have advertised for years and she have been no wiser for it, and we no nearer to finding her. Or we might have advertised for her and found her, and then discovered that she had never been married to Marmaduke Marchmont at all; it might have been simply a got-up story, just as this boy's story may be a got-up affair, now."

"No—no—the boy is in absolute ignorance, as yet, of his relationship to Miss

Staunton. Miss Staunton found it out in the course of her visits to the sick child and by the most utter accident."

"You have still to prove that they are Marmaduke Marchmont's children."

"Oh! yes—yes—as a matter of course."

"Of course, it is very good, very generous of Miss Staunton to wish to provide for them, but I think she proposes to do too much. A sum of ten thousand pounds apiece would be a vast inheritance for children brought up to sweep crossings, would educate them and keep them in comfort afterwards. I do not think, speaking from my knowledge of John Marchmont's strong sense of stern justice, that he would have made his son Marmaduke equal with his dead daughter's child, not, that is to say, if he had known that he was married to a person immeasurably his inferior. He would probably have left him twenty or thirty thousand pounds, if as much. You will probably remember that Mrs. Staunton was the very light of John Marchmont's eyes,

he was never tired of praising her affection, her goodness, her dutifulness towards him—depend upon it, he would never have made the children of the son who had deceived him equal with her."

"That's as may be—one cannot tell with any certainty, what he would have done. Anyway, my ward has fully made up her mind that, so soon as she comes of age, she will do what she considers justice to these children. Meantime, I shall advance such money as is necessary for their suitable education and we shall do everything we possibly can to counteract the effects of the life they have lived already."

"It is exceedingly generous of you both," returned the lawyer, in a non-committing kind of tone. "Then you will make quite sure that such a marriage really did take place?"

"As a matter of course," replied Mr. Legros, who began, somewhat unfavorably to that gentleman, to think the lawyer "a cut-and-dried old stick-in-the-mud," to

whom Mr. Scrooge was quite a model of warmth and good fellowship!

He remained at Manchester that night and returned to town early the following morning. I am afraid that I have not before clearly expressed the fact that the late John Marchmont had been a Manchester man, and that he had lived at a beautiful old place a few miles from that great center of wealth and industry.

He did not reach Egerton Square until nearly dinner-time, and Effie was awaiting him with the utmost anxiety, as though upon the dictates of Mr. Jerningham's lips hung the issue of life or death, or if not quite so much as that, at least the issues of fate for Ted Brown and his sister Nelly.

"Well, what have you settled?" she cried, eagerly.

"Settled—nothing—my dear child, nothing," Mr. Legros replied. "That Jerningham is simply a cut-and-dried old fool without a place in his head ready to take an iota of the common idea into. He didn't, well,

he couldn't very well say so, but I could see very plainly that he thought you were a quixotic little fool, full of romantic notions, and that I was little short of a criminal to encourage you in them."

"But you do encourage me in them, dear guardy," she cried.

"I hope I shall always encourage you to do what is just and right," he replied. "But with an unsympathetic, hard-headed, cold man of business, the case is different. He, naturally enough, looks first at the legal side of everything, of every question, and he sees that *legally* you own every penny of your grandfather's money, and that is all he troubles himself about. Perhaps he is right, so far as his lights go."

"And," said Effie, in a tone not very complimentary to Mr. Jerningham, "I don't think they go very far."

"Ah! well, I daresay they have done very well for him so far. He seems to be in very good circumstances and to be a man of weight in his own place. But about to-

morrow—I think your best plan will be to go down and question the boy more closely and get him to show you any papers he may have of his mother's. If she was Marchmont's wife, she is almost sure to have her marriage lines; it is a point upon which that class of woman is, as a rule, most particular."

"And I may tell them?" Effie asked.

"Well—that depends. If you find the marriage certificate, yes—there can be no harm and perhaps a great deal of good in their knowing that they are your cousins; it will give them something to live up to. If you do not find them, I would *on no account* tell them a word of your relationship to the Marchmonts—not at first, at all events."

"Very well—I will do just what you say, but I feel," Effie cried—"as sure as sure can be that I shall find it—and then, what shall we do with them? For they can't stop in Denver Street, can they?"

"I should send them off to the seaside

for a few months—with a tutor and a governess ; that can be easily arranged. But not here, Effie, my dear. I cannot do with them here—I draw the line at that, both for your sake and my own."

"I wasn't thinking of having them here, guardy," she cried with a gay laugh—"Why, just think of Barker's haughty and dignified disgust—he would have a fit, to a certainty. And then there'd be all the rest of them—no, I really don't think that plan would work, anyway."

The following afternoon, therefore, Effie went down to Denver Street again, and as Ted was not in, she sat down to wait until he came back. She found that it was but little use trying to get any information out of Nelly, who had not been born until after Marmaduke Marchmont's death, and really knew nothing or next to nothing of her mother's story.

"No," she said, shaking her head blankly —"but Ted, he'll know, Miss Effie, Ted's sure to know, and he won't be long now."

Nor was Ted very long—he came in a few minutes later, and to him Effie put her questions at once.

"Papers o' mother's?" he said—"why, yes, miss, I've a whole box full of 'em. See 'ere"—opening the desk, with a key, which he took out of a little box on the chimney-shelf—"all these was mother's."

"And I may look at them? It's to do you good," Effie added apologetically, for to her mind it was a great liberty to take, even though it was to serve them.

"Why, of course, miss," Ted replied, pushing the desk towards her—"though I don't suppose you'll find aught to interest you there."

Effie all the same was deeply interested—she took out the various papers and packets with reverential fingers—and first of all her eyes fell upon a letter which had the address of her old home printed in red letters at the head of the sheet—"The Hall, Rowden, Cheshire." It began—"My darling Agnes," and was signed at the end "Till then, your own Marmie."

CHAPTER XIII.

PROOF!

THERE were many letters from Marmaduke Marchmont in the old desk which Ted Brown laid open before Effie—each and all just such letters as a man would write to his wife, each addressed to "Mrs. Brown," and not any of them containing any direct allusion to the actual fact of their marriage. They were exceedingly affectionate in tone and were all signed in the same way—"Your own Marmie."

Effie laid them on one side with a sigh—a sigh for the fatality which had kept apart those two for whom the sun of love had shone so brightly.

"What a pity he did not tell grandpapa all about her!" she thought. "Grandpapa

couldn't have had the heart to force them to part, for, by his letters, she must have been all that was good and sweet and true, even if she was not quite a lady. Fancy her calling him 'Marmie,' Uncle Duke, who was so unapproachable, so hot-tempered, so—so forbidding sometimes! Ah! dear," and then she went on with her task of turning over the contents of the old desk.

There was a bunch of faded violets done up in a half sheet of notepaper; and there was a little faded valentine with an old-fashioned verse on a bit of thin white satin in the midst of the silvered roses which formed the chief ornamentation—a faint scent of sandal-wood still clung to it. Effie read the stilted lines, her heart sympathizing entirely with their sentiment.

"THE HEART THAT'S TRUE."

"Ardent in its earliest tie:
Faithful in its latest sigh:
Love and Friendship—godlike pair
Find the throne of glory there.
Proudly scorning bribe and threat,

Nought can break the seal once set;
All the evil gold can do
Cannot warp the heart that's true."

And he had sent it to her! There was an inscription with his name on the back of it, and the date on the post-mark was nearly twelve years old. Poor Marmie; and poor true heart that had died broken, although falsity and deceit had never come between them.

Then there was a bundle—not a large one—of more or less ill-spelt and ill-written letters evidently from Mrs. Brown's own people, apparently from her father and mother. They were all bitter and reproachful in tone, and freely used words which brought a blush to the cheeks of the girl as she read them. And there was one from a brother evidently, dated about five years previously—"Dear Agnes" it said—"you and me 'as taken different ways in life—you marryed a gentleman, a misterous person that none of us ever saw, who died as misterously as he

lived. I marryed a highly respecletable young woman with money saved and a good charackter and I don't think we're at all likely to mix. Anyhow, it's no use of your coming to Grove End, as we don't want you and haven't got a spare room to put you in. I enclose P. O. for two and six for the sake of old times.—Your aff Bro—James Berry."

"Poor child!—poor child!" Effie murmured, her eyes dim with tears, her heart aching with pity.

Then there were certificates of baptism of the two children—father's name, "Marmaduke Marchmont," and last of all, put away in a separate envelope, was the certificate of marriage, for which she had been patiently searching, a marriage which had taken place in a London church, witnessed by Sarah Ann Binns and Henry Hammond, evidently, from their very shaky caligraphy two of the officials of the church.

"Ah! there it is," she cried in a tone of relief.

"What's that, miss?" Ted asked.

"Your father's and mother's marriage-lines, Ted," Effie answered.

"Lor', Miss," he returned cheerfully, "if you'd asked me for them I could ha' given you that without troubling you to look for it and without readin' all them old letters."

"Well, Ted," said Effie trembling as she spoke. "I have something to tell you—you and Nelly. I expect you will be very much surprised, but Marmaduke Marchmont was my uncle."

The boy stared at her in speechless astonishment, he scarcely realized the import of her words. "He was your uncle, Miss Staunton," he said at length, "then—then what are you to us?"

"I am your cousin—your own cousin," said Effie, the tears getting the better of her and falling in two bright drops down her pale cheeks. "And when I think, Ted, how I was the child who had all the money, while your poor mother went out into the cold and hard world with her

little fatherless baby in her arms, I feel —well, I feel as if I never, never could make up to you for all that she and you two have suffered. But we will alter all this—all this. To-morrow you shall leave Denver Street—you shall go into comfortable rooms at once, and, as soon as you have got new things, you shall go to the sea-side and stay a long time and enjoy your-selves, and Nelly shall get strong and well, and——" and then she caught little Nelly to her and held her close to her heart, her words ending in a sob of excitement and delight.

"Miss Effie——" Nelly began, but Effie imperiously interrupted her.

"*Don't* call me Miss Effie," she cried—"I'm your cousin, dear, don't you under-stand? Call me Effie—plain Effie."

But Nelly and Ted only looked at one another with a dismay that was simply comic! And, after a minute or so, Ted "up and spoke."

"It's no use, Miss Effie," he said man-

fully—"We may be your cousins, but we're not goin' to call you just Effie, Nell an' me, not we—we couldn't do it. It wouldn't sound natural. We'll 'ave to get used to bein' your cousin first and I doubt it'll take us a long time to do it. Miss Effie, are you sure it's true?"

"As sure as I can be of anything," she answered. "Well, I must go now—I will come down to-morrow and tell you just what Mr. Legros thinks you had better do! You won't go to the office any more, Ted. I will tell Mr. Legros not to expect you there again. You won't mind my taking this" holding up the certificate—"to show him?"

"Oh! no, miss, of course not," Ted answered.

"And perhaps," said Effie, "I had better take those of your birth—yours and Nelly's.—How sensible it was of your mother to have them, and how much trouble it saves."

"Well, mother always thought they

might be wanted some day," said Ted, simply.

Effie, therefore, went home in triumph to her guardian and as he laughingly told her, presented a perhaps unique spectacle, for surely not one young heiress out of a million, would sing and rejoice over the discovery of undoubted claimants to her property. But Effie did, she rejoiced as she had not done over anything since the failure of Barking, Pottington, & Co., and perhaps most of all, she rejoiced in the fact that the discovery had come about through that little volume of very insipid verses, which bore, as author, the name of Lady Geraldine Beaufort.

She went to bed early that night in spite of her excitement, for she wanted to be alone, to think over a little plan by which she thought it just possible she might get news of Austin! What if she were to write to Lady Geraldine to tell her the romantic history of her uncle's children, and to let her know that it had been through her

volume of poems that they had been discovered? By those means she might even come to know Lady Geraldine, and then it would be quite easy to ask in a careless and quite indifferent sort of way, where her son was living, and to mention quite as casually, that she had met him about in Town one or two seasons.

I think Effie Staunton was happier that night than she had been since she last saw Austin Beaufort, and she appeared to such advantage when she went down to breakfast in the morning, that Mr. Legros fairly laughed at her.

"Why, Effie," he exclaimed—"you look more bright and blooming than I've seen you look for months. Evidently it suits you to get rid of some of your money. Shall I help you to get rid of the rest? It would easily be done."

"Not at all, thanks, guardy," she replied. —"Oh! by the bye before I forget—I told Ted not to go to the office again. You won't expect him, will you?"

"Well, he ought to have given notice in the usual way," Mr. Legros said quietly—"it always looks bad when an employe disappears, so to speak. However as you told him——"

"Oh! I'm so sorry—I never thought of that," Effie cried—"*how* ungrateful of me."

But Ted Brown had thought of it or something very much like it, and when Legros entered the office almost the first person he saw was the ex-crossing-sweeper Ted Brown. Ted, in fact, appeared in his room with a note which he had just received from a gentleman, with strict instructions not to give into any hand but Mr. Legros's own.

"Why—" said the master, turning in his chair to look at him—"why, Miss Staunton told me you were not coming any more——"

"Miss Staunton did tell me I needn't come again, sir," said Ted.

"Then why did you?"

"Well, sir, I hadn't got my discharge from you and—and I thought I'd best come as usual," the boy said, hesitatingly.

Not a little to his surprise, the stately head of the great house clapped him on the shoulder—"My lad," he said—"your grandfather, John Marchmont, was one of my greatest friends. It's a thousand pities he never lived to know you, for you're just after his own heart! Now, after to-day you are free—you can tell any one with whom you may have got friendly, that you have come into some money and that you are no longer compelled to do this kind of work for your living. Do you see?"

"I do sir," said Ted—"Oh! but sir, I do wish I hadn't got to go."

"Tut—tut—we'll find something else for you to do," said the head of the firm kindly.

CHAPTER XIV.

EXTREMES MEET.

And all this time Austin Beaufort was learning his work and doing his duty as a soldier, and Private Austin of the 150th King's Dragoons was beginning to have a very respectable reputation among his superiors as a steady-going reliable young fellow, who had got over the roughest part of joining without making any enemies and also without getting into trouble of any kind.

That he should be in favor with his officers was not a thing greatly to be wondered at, but that he should be in favor with the non-commissioned officers of his troop was more surprising and also very greatly to his own advantage.

And he had made one or two firm friends, a fact which helped to make the life much more bearable than it had been in the ginning. They were both gentleman, though they were not both quite of his own class. The one—John Smith, otherwise Jack Hastings—was like himself the son of a parson, like himself, he had been at a 'Varsity and, unlike himself, he had when there run wildly into debt and had lost himself in the ranks of the 150th King's Dragoons rather than go home and face his father's anger and just wrath!

The other had no such history, but being the son of a large farmer (who had come to that worst of all griefs, bankruptcy, through no fault of his own but simply because he had had the misfortune to be born the elder son of a large family, who must all be portioned out of an estate never a very large one and now gone down to about a third of its original value,) he had come to the conclusion that the army was the best possible opening for a young man, who had no cap-

ital beyond a pair of capable hands and a strong, sound and healthy constitution. So he too had enlisted in the ranks of the 150th and the three young men became firm friends.

Looking at the question from an outside point of view, it is difficult to see what these three young men had to gain in keeping to their present career. In a couple of years or in three years at the most they might, if they behaved themselves, be gazetted to a commission, and when that blissful day arrived, how would they manage to live? None of the three had a penny of private income, and with regard to our hero, he would be no better off than he would have been as a clerk in the City at a hundred and fifty a year. He did not, somehow, seem to think of that, and, of course, he had that idea lurking in his mind that Effie Staunton's guardian would raise no objection to her marrying a cavalry officer with a mother who was an earl's daughter. Still supposing that Effie married—well, but

Beaufort never did suppose that Effie would marry! He always treasured a fond hope that Effie was as true as steel and that she would wait patiently until he should go back again.

Truly his faith was marvellous, for during all these months he had no news of her. He often turned over those papers to be found on the tables of the regimental reading-room, in which society news was to be found. But though he carefully scanned the accounts of many a party given at houses where he and she had been used to meet in the old days—he never saw her name among the lists of guests.

"Has she given up going out?" he thought once or twice.

Nor did he ever directly hear a word about her. Often and often he longed to write and ask for some tiny scrap of news of her, but he always conquered the weakness, feeling that it was a weakness of which he would be ashamed some day. True he was more than once sorely tempted

to write to one of his old friends in Town and ask in a general casual sort of way after some of his old acquaintances, Miss Staunton among them, but he never did it; he had a sort of feeling that his meaning would be what he called "spotted in a jiffy." Therefore he went on existing without news of any kind.

If he had only known where to write for it he could have had news as secret as the grave, as loyal to himself as he was to Effie, he could have had news which would have made him ask for a short furlough—and how odd it sounded to his own ears, when he spoke of himself once as "when I can get furlough," how oddly it seemed to his thoughts when he thought of the same word in application to himself—and go off to London and straight to Egerton Square, there to hear from her what she, poor child, was longing to tell him! But you see Austin Beaufort did not know, and never for one instant gave a thought to his old friend and landlady, Mrs. Tasker, as

being one of the few persons in the world who, at that moment, could have helped him into happiness again.

For Effie, who had screwed up all her courage and had written to Lady Geraldine to tell her the very romantic story which had been made complete through the agency of a certain faded little volume of weak poems, finding no good result from the correspondence beyond a certain amount of pleased civility from her ladyship, began to despair of ever seeing Austin Beaufort again; and one day finding herself driving quite by accident down the street in which he had been used to live had by a sudden impulse stopped and knocked at the door, scarcely knowing why she did so or what she was going to say.

The maid who had been there during the latter part of Beaufort's reign, opened the door, the one who had feared that he might be going to make away with himself. She stared with surprise at the pretty young lady in her dainty summer

clothes of delicate gray and the sight of the elegant victoria in waiting did not lessen her confusion. In fact she hid her soiled frock and smudged face as well as she could behind the door and peeped round it in a very shame-faced kind of way.

"I wanted to ask you—" Effie began in a hesitating voice—"was this the house Mr. Beaufort lived at?"

"Mr. Beaufort 'e did live 'ere, miss," Hannah answered. She scented some sort of a romance and straightway forgot her dirty face and came more into view, still, however, keeping firm hold of the door and using it as a support for her whole person from her temple down to her foot.

"Can you give me his present address?" Effie asked, blushing a fine scarlet from chin to brow. "I—I—want to write to him—on a matter of business," she added, growing hotter and hotter every moment and feeling that she was a very poor hand at the art of prevarication.

"Yes, miss—well, I don't rightly know

myself. Perhaps Mrs. Tasker would know. Will you step inside?"

"No. I'd rather not come in," said Effie hastily; she began, in truth, to wish that she had not come at all, for what should she, what could she say to the good woman who would, as likely as not, guess her secret in a minute?

"There's no one in the dining-room, miss, do step in," Hannah urged hospitably. "Do now, miss. Missis 'll only blame me if I leave you standing on the step."

Effie accordingly did step in and found herself in a neat and fairly well-furnished dining-room, with quaint panelled walls painted sage green, and with a piece or two of nice Chippendale furniture not in a very good state of repair.

"This was Mr. Beaufort's room," Hannah informed her, as she betook herself out of the room after ostentatiously dusting a chair with her apron.

So this was where he had lived! He had strummed a little on that piano, and had

stuck his invitations into the sides of the dulled old Empire looking-glass with its tarnished gold frame, which in form, aye, and in color too, in spite of its shabbiness, was still a thing of beauty. He had sat in this very chair, and had eaten at that table, and looked out of that very window, and—and—oh! the scalding tears were gushing into her eyes and she began to wish she had not come—yes—but a footfall sounded in the passage, a heavy, solid footstep, accompanied by a peculiar wheezing and snorting, as of some one oppressed by want of breath. She turned her eyes, hastily dried, to the door, and then the mistress of the house entered.

Mrs. Tasker had, of course, been thoroughly primed by the romantic, if slovenly, Hannah, and was filled with the idea that this was "Mr. Beaufort's young lady," to use her own words, who had come to try to get news of him.

"Good-morning, miss," she said with a sweeping sort of bow, which shook all her

fat person like a jelly being carried to table, "you wanted Mr. Beaufort's address?"

"Yes—I—that is—I happened to be passing," Effie faltered, "and I remembered he used to live here, and——"

"Ah, yes—three years he was 'ere with me," Mrs. Tasker remarked plaintively. "I shall never get such another lodger—so kind and considerate, it was a pleasure to do for 'im. I'd had the very worst of luck till he come, and then I never 'ad my rooms empty—three sets of 'em—empty as long as Mr. Beaufort stayed in the 'ouse. I shall never forget the morning he broke it to me he 'ad to go, never. It was a dreadful trouble to me, my dear young lady, when Mr. Beaufort left me, I can assure you. Indeed I can't say as I've 'ad any real luck since. 'Is rooms I never 'ave let, and now I've only got one party on the second and she's as cantankerous as she knows 'ow to be. Oh! it was a bad day for me when Mr. Beaufort and me parted, and I begged 'im almost on my bended knees not to do it.

If he 'ad run up a few pounds with me I shouldn't 'ave cared, not I! And to think of what—" and then she broke off suddenly, sniffed and wiped her eyes, as if to say "No, I needn't tell you *that*. Best keep *that* to ourselves. One never knows how ladies takes things."

Effie did not, however, notice the sudden check in the good lady's voluble explanation. She saw that it was Mrs. Tasker's habit to explain at length, and she imagined that she had paused then from sheer want of breath! Which only showed that she had neither grasped Mrs. Tasker's flow of language or her strength of jaw-power!

"Then you know where he is now," she said—"you can give me his address?"

"I wish I could," said the landlady mournfully, "and I would if I knew it; but I 'aven't any idea what part of the world he's in—his own mother come to see me the other day; *she* fancied I might know. But I didn't and so I 'ad to tell her."

"And she does not know where he is," Effie cried.

"She did not a fortnight ago, miss," the other answered—"she 'ad 'eard from 'im. Yes—three times I think she told me. 'E told her 'e was well and a-living, and that was all—and his letters was all posted in London and her ladyship fancied he might be 'ere."

"Do you think—" said Effie—"that if he ever came back to London he would come here?"

"I think he would," the landlady replied.

"Then if he does—I wish you would let me know—he is a great friend of ours, Mr. Beaufort, and—and I might be able to do him a very good turn and—and I should think it very kind of you if you would. This is my card—if you'll keep it."

"I will let you know, miss," Mrs. Tasker said in quite a motherly manner.

"And—and—you won't be offended, will you? But you said you hadn't had

very good luck since he left and if you would accept this from me, you will make me very happy," and she pressed something into the old lady's hand and hastened out.

The redoubtable Hannah was lingering about the entrance, having washed her face and slipped on a clean apron and she followed the young lady out to the smart carriage and tucked the dust-rug over her feeling quite as if she were a grand footman in Mayfair and altogether above her present position as "general" in a Westminister lodging house, where things were not going very prosperously.

"Thank—you," said Effie gently—and slipped a coin into her not unwilling but somewhat unaccustomed hand.

"Thank you kindly, miss," she said, beaming.

Having watched the carriage out of sight she went back into the house again. "What a pretty creature," she remarked to her mistress with whom she was on very friendly terms.

"A sweet young thing," ejaculated Mrs. Tasker.

"And she slip a sovereign into my 'and," Hannah went on, bursting with her news.

"That's lucky for you, just for the trouble of putting her dress straight. Aye, but it was for Mr. Beaufort's sake, though maybe he'll never know it."

She was a wise woman in her way, for until she found herself safely alone she never even opened the hand which Effie had closed fast with her slender daintily gloved fingers. But when she did she found a five-pound note there, and I am bound to say that tears of gratitude stood in the widow's eyes.

"It's like manna from 'eaven," she murmured. "There's the gas-bill and the coals, and a trifle to the butcher and another to the baker—oh! God bless her pretty face—and bring 'em together again in the end."

CHAPTER XV.

A PAR' IN THE PAPERS.

Nobody ever knew how the romantic story of the two children in Denver Street got afloat; for by Mr. Legros' advice Effie was very careful to keep all the details thereof strictly to herself. Yet some weeks or rather months after they had left that neighborhood behind forever, some one found out the main facts of their story and started them off on a round of alteration and exaggeration.

To go back a little, as both Mr. Legros and Effie, and also Ted Marchmont himself, were firmly convinced that the very first great need was to get rid as quickly as possible of all evidences of their former life and speech, it was decided to send them

to a pleasant southern watering place in charge of Effie's old governess, a middle-aged and very kindly lady no longer dependent upon her earnings for her living.

She had given up teaching when she had finished Effie off, and was settled in a dainty little flat in Kensington with a neat maid who had been schoolroom-maid in Egerton Square and was greatly attached to her. And it was to her that Mr. Legros' capable mind turned in the face of the first difficulty of what should be done with the children.

"I know it will be a great trial to you if you care to undertake it," he said, "but it is essential and most important that they should be put in the way of education and everyday training at once. I will make you an allowance of five hundred a year if you will make a home for them, feed and clothe them out of it. All educational expenses shall be extras and if necessary we can make fresh arrangements. But the children—they are but children yet—must

have a proper home and be under proper influence, and besides that I don't want Effie to have them—she's too young and too impressionable altogether to mix too much with them."

"Yes, you are quite right. Effie's greatest weakness is her impulsiveness," Miss Ward replied—"only her kind heart keeps her right! Well I will take this charge. To tell you the truth, Mr. Legros, I am a little tired of having nothing to do."

"That's a great weight off my mind," Mr. Legros said, drawing a long breath of relief. "Then the sooner you get them suitably clothed and away at the sea-side the better. You might take them across to the French coast later on, if you like."

"Yes, it would be good for them," Miss Ward agreed.

"And you'll bear in mind that for years this little lad had all the anxieties and responsibilities of a man—that he has been absolutely his own master and has come in

and gone out at his own will. It won't do to tie him down like an ordinary boy who has been cooped up and never been free to please himself about anything. But you'll find him a good lad and an honorable lad, who doesn't lose his head and is desperately anxious to get on and be a gentleman. I don't think you will have much if any trouble, and Effie tells me that the little girl is the sweetest little soul in the world but so very delicate."

So it was all settled; and from Denver Street Ted and Nelly—Brown no longer, but bearing their own name of Marchmont now—went to the pretty artistic flat in Kensington and their new life began at once; I say began at once, because although they had no attempt at lessons at first, there was so much for both to learn that was absolutely new and yet which could not be taught out of books.

Then they went off to Eastbourne and for six weeks revelled there in all the pleasures of a seaside holiday. And from

there they went to Boulogne which to both was a never-ceasing panorama of delight. Meantime Mr. Legros and Effie went to Homburg as usual and nothing out of the common way happened. But, when they returned to Town in October, after a trip to the Engadine and a fortnight at the Italian Lakes, winding up with a few days in Paris, the romantic story of the young heiress's cousins had somehow got abroad and was *the* topic of the hour, although, it is true, it had been enlarged and touched up until its heroine scarcely knew it again!

Not that it affected or annoyed Effie very much; she would rather for the children's own sake that the whole story had remained in oblivion, she did not see what business the facts of the case could be to any outside persons nor why they should be so deeply interested in the affair as to put little paragraphs in the chatty papers about it. What difference could it possibly make to people whom she did not know and who did not know her, whether she

had ten thousand a year or none? After all, she argued to herself, she had not found so much good from her wealth so far, at least, though she had more money to spend than any girl of her acquaintance, and had her own carriages, horses, coachman and so on, the man she loved had gone away, without saying a word of the love that he had *looked* for months past. And yet, he must have known that she loved him, he must have known that!

By this time, she had almost given up hope of ever seeing him again, of the crooked being made straight or the rough places of her love smooth. She was not actively unhappy, but she was really in a much more deplorable condition, for she was passively miserable. It is very bad to beat your heart out against the bars of fate, like a bird beating its wings against the gilded bars of its cage; yet this straining and beating may possibly end by showing a way out of captivity, while the poor prisoner who sits down passively to

endure the state of things that be, has no chance, unless deliverance comes from some outside source, of shortening even by an hour an imprisonment which may last during his whole life.

And so it was with Effie Staunton. Once or twice she had made impulsive efforts to find out where Austin Beaufort was, and when those failed she felt that fate itself was against her, and that she had better give up all idea of ever seeing him again. And I need not tell you that she was very miserable.

Well, in due course, the papers which contained the highly seasoned paragraphs relating to Miss Staunton's fortune found their way into the reading-rooms of the various branches of Her Majesty's Service, and among others into the regimental reading-room of the 150th Dragoons. And one evening Corporal Austin strolled in, having half an hour to spare, and picked up *The Park News*, that he might see what was

going on in the world in which he had once lived and moved.

He saw nothing very strikingly interesting until he came to a startling heading:

"THE HEIRESS AND THE CROSSING-SWEEPER."

This was enough in itself to send his thoughts flying back to the dear heiress who still reigned supreme in his heart, and he read on with keenest interest to see what this paper had to say on the subject of heiresses and crossing-sweepers. He read a little way—uttered an exclamation of surprise, and then settled down to carefully read to the end.

"Why—it's *Effie!*" he cried aloud joyously.

A comrade who was studying *Answers* on the other side of the table, looked up with a smile. "Hallo, old chap—you're very excited. Any particular news to-day?"

"Only a mention of a friend of mine," Austin answered quietly.

Then he got up and went out into the

dark cold evening air. He wanted to be alone, to feel the keen air of late October blowing on his head, to be quiet—to think. What must he do? Now—*now* he could go and tell her how he loved her, now that she was no longer Miss Staunton, the heiress, the owner of half a million of money, but a penniless girl, a penniless girl whom it would be no presumption to love.

He went out of barracks and walked away into the country that he might think it all out. How well he remembered going down to Hammersmith with her that night, and how sweet and good she had been to the sick child, and for reward, it had come about that the two children whom she had succored, were the rightful owners of all her wealth, or rather the wealth which she and every one else believed to be hers. And to think of that boy with his sharp little face and his cute ragamuffin ways, to say nothing of his Cockney lingo, being the owner of all that money, while Effie—but there, it did not do to think about it, he must, he

could only be thankful that the barrier between him and Effie Staunton had fallen down at last and that he was free to tell her of his love, though, alas, he had nothing, absolutely nothing else to offer her in return for hers.

CHAPTER XVI.

IN LUCK'S WAY.

WITH a man whose record was so good as Corporal Austin's, it was an easy matter to get a few days' leave, and he went off to London with a heart as light as a schoolboy's going home for the holidays.

He managed to get a carriage to himself and he changed his clothes in the train, substituting a suit of ordinary tweed clothes for the uniform which he had worn without intermission since he had enlisted. It was not quite a regulation thing to do, but like a good many other soldiers on furlough, Austin did it—and very smart and comfortable he felt when his toilet was finished. The only point of his appearance that was different was perhaps that his hands had

not the white well-kept look that they had worn in Town, but though there were traces of rough work about them, he had really been very particular not to let his hands get into bad repair, so to speak, and when he had drawn on a pair of new dogskin gloves, he felt quite himself again.

When he reached London he took a cab and drove straight to his old quarters in Westminster, where he succeeded in so thoroughly scaring the redoubtable Hannah that when she caught sight of his face she turned and fled shrieking into the lower regions—"Missis—missis, 'ere's Mr. Beaufort come back and I'm not sure whether it's 'im or 'is ghost."

This was enough to send the good lady of the house upstairs at double-quick pace, the result of which was that she arrived in the entrance breathless but beaming—"I'm that short o' breath, Mr. Beaufort," she remarked when she had come to a little—"it's worry that's what it is—it's worry."

"I hope you've not been worried more than usual, Mrs. Tasker," said Beaufort cheerily—worldly prospects were not at their brightest for him just then, but he could not help feeling cheerful and gay—for was he not in London again and was he not going to see *her*? "The chief question with me is can you take me in for a few days?"

"Why, yes, Mr. Beaufort, your rooms is here just as you left 'em—and right welcome you are. I'll 'ave a fire put in both rooms, and—oh! dear sir, the sight of you s good for sore eyes," she broke off with quite a burst of affection.

Beaufort fairly laughed—"You're very complimentary, Mrs. Tasker, I'm sure. Now, Hannah, my old friend who never would learn how to fold clothes properly, she was positively scared by the very sight of me. Well then you can take me in—that's all right. I'll have a wash and go right out. I'll dine out, of course."

"Just as you please, sir—" in truth Mrs.

Tasker was cogitating how to tell him about the pretty young lady who had been so interested in his whereabouts—"I've had a good many inquiries after you, sir—you've been very much missed."

"That's good to hear. And who asked for me?"

"Well, her ladyship came for one and of course I couldn't tell her—"

"You didn't tell her—"

"That you'd gone away to 'list for a soldier? No, Mr. Beaufort, I hadn't the 'eart to and that's truth. And there was another lady who came in a carriage."

"Oh!" Beaufort's voice was curiously straining and his heart beating hard now.

"She came casual-like as she was passing—she said she remembered the street was the one you used to live in and thought, I might 'ave your address. And, of course, I didn't tell her nothing neither."

"Quite right, Mrs. Tasker, I'm immensely obliged to you," he replied.

His tone was not encouraging, and Mrs. Tasker did not attempt to tell him any more. He smartened himself up a little but did not change his clothes—indeed he could not, for the suit that he had on was all that he had saved of his former wardrobe, with the exception of his evening clothes. And then he went down to the underground railway and took a ticket for South Kensington. He saw a man he knew on the platform, a man who held out his hand and greeted him with —"Why, Beaufort, old chap. I haven't seen you for ages. You look uncommonly fine. How d'you do, old chap?"

Now this sort of thing was very pleasant. It was a delight to feel that his old landlady had missed him and that a casual acquaintance was glad to meet him again—it was a good augury of the reception he was likely to get in Egerton Square.

For to Egerton Square I need not tell you he was bound, and when he reached the well-remembered door and the solemn

Barker opened it, he really felt as if he could never have been away at all.

"Ah! Barker—how are you? Miss Staunton at home?"

"She is, sir, thank you, sir," answered Barker with a grin. "This way, if you please, sir," and he led the way to Effie's little sitting-room and announced, perhaps in a little less wooden tone than usual. "Mr. Beaufort."

There was a cosy corner arrangement of glass and white wood with yellow brocade cushions and here Effie was sitting with her back to the door. At the sound of Barker's voice, however, she jumped up with a startled little cry—"Oh! is it *you?*" she cried, in an overjoyed voice.

I don't know why a year's absence should have brought about an understanding without a word being uttered on either side, but in less than a moment she was in Beaufort's arms strained to his heart as if he never meant to let her go again.

"Where have you been all this long

time ?" she cried when at last he stopped kissing her. "Why did you go like that —you nearly broke my heart! Oh! it was cruel of you, Austin, downright cruel."

"I did not mean it so," he said humbly —"I thought——"

"Oh! yes, I knew what you thought, oh, yes—but why need you have thought that and if you thought so then, why did you come back now? Why have given me a whole year's pain for nothing ?"

"Well but everything is so different now," he answered—"I felt under the circumstances that I might come back—and——"

"Under what circumstances ?" she asked.

"That you had lost all your fortune—Oh! my darling, I'm so sorry for you, but I couldn't help in a measure rejoicing when I read it."

"Oh! you saw that!" she said.

"I did—And I asked for leave and got it, and came off at once——"

"You asked for leave—from whom?" she asked in astonishment.

He saw then that he had let slip the fact of his having enlisted. "Well, you see, darling, when I found my firm were hopelessly smashed up and the times were so awfully bad I had no hope of ever getting anything in Town, I—I—went and enlisted."

"You enlisted—you became a common soldier," she cried.

"There is no such thing as a *common* soldier, dearest," he said gently—"I became a private, if that's what you mean, and I'm a corporal now."

"Austin"—she said—"why didn't you ask Guardy if he had a place for you?"

"I never thought of it, my love," he exclaimed—But I'll tell you what, darling, we'll ask him if he can't find me a berth now, for it's certain we can't live out of soldiering, although, mind, I like it."

Miss Staunton smiled—"Yes, we might ask him but I don't think it's quite neces-

sary, dear. You see newspapers don't *always* get hold of quite the right story and they didn't in this case. As a matter of fact, I have not lost a half-penny because my grandfather's money was all willed to me. When I found that these two children were my uncle's children, I determined to provide for them and to share my grandfather's money with them as soon as I was old enough. And as that won't be for two years or until I marry, I have done nothing, and it is Mr. Legros who is paying for everything at present. As soon as I am of age or—or——"

"The other contingency happens—yes?" ended Austin.

"Well—then I shall repay Mr. Legros and divide my grandfather's money equally between them—so they will have about sixty thousand pounds a-piece. That is the real state of the case, only we didn't think it was worth while to contradict it."

"Then you are an heiress still, Effie?" half ruefully.

"But you did not know it when you came here, so it is all right—You cannot draw back now if you want to——"

"But I don't want to—I only wanted to do what was right, and—and I don't know what your guardian will say even now."

"But I do. I could have told you a year ago and I might have had a happy year instead of a wretched one.

"Was it a wretched year?" he asked tenderly.

"How did you find it?" she demanded, answering his question by asking another. And you'll leave the army at once, Austin!" she went on imperatively—"Apart from myself I don't grudge the year of soldiering, it has made you so much more of a man, and you look so big and bronzed altogether it suits you—but you won't go on, will you?"

"I will do anything, everything that you wish," he replied promptly.

Well—there is but little more to tell! That they were married and lived happily

ever after? Yes, they were married certainly, and little Nelly Marchmont was sole bridesmaid to her cousin, and comported herself with such sweetness and dignity on the occasion that most people laughed the crossing-sweeper theory to scorn. And Ted in his well-fitting Eton suit and a tall hat (think of that boy in a tall hat) with lavender gloves and patent-leather boots, was quite an important person. People thought the young cousins were shy, and so the little bridesmaid in very truth was, but Ted, by previous arrangement with Miss Ward, talked as little as possible, because as he very truly said—"I haven't got right off Cockney yet, and the less I say, the less people will know anything about it."

And what of the bride? Well, a sweeter and bonnier bride I think never went to church! A little nervous, with her cheeks as white as her satin gown, but with her sweet eyes full of a new proud light which let a great many people into the secret of the *sad looks* of the year that was gone.

While as for the groom! He wasn't nervous, nor white nor anything but fairly beaming with happiness, and as they passed down the aisle, not two but one now, a man remarked in an undertone to his neighbor —"I always liked old Beaufort myself, and what a fine chap he's got to be—looks more like a soldier than a City man. Didn't it strike you so?"

"Well, he's got a very marked cap line, but men cultivate that sort of thing now-a-days. I shouldn't have thought Beaufort would do that though."

"Nor I," rejoined the other—"Anyhow he's a dear old chap and I'm real glad, after all, that he's tumbled in luck's way."

THE END.

MOTH-MULLEIN

BY

S. BARING-GOULD

AUTHOR OF "URITH"

MOTH-MULLEIN.

CHAPTER I.

To the outward or homeward bound traveller on the Thames what a contrast betwixt the Kent and the Essex sides of the river: the Kent side, with its pleasant chalk hills, woods, and apple orchards; the Essex side flat, treeless, receiver-general of the London sewage!

When Jutes and Saxons invaded Britain, and came to divide the land, then the Jutes said, "We have had the flats in our ancestral Jutland, time out of mind; we will take the hills, and if you don't like the swamps you must fight us." The Saxons growled and accommodated themselves with the Essex side of the river, and the Jutes kept their feet dry, and rheumatism

out of their bones, and ague out of their blood, on the Kent side.

Once on a time the Thames and Medway were all one—that was a grand mouth for the river, and then the hills looked down on the water from Greenwich to Gadshill; but now Kent has made a concession to Essex, and acquired a flat alluvial tract that divides the Thames from the Medway.

Above Greenhythe the chalk hills are much honeycombed with quarries, and huge kilns smoke perpetually, resolving the chalk into cement. Further inland the hills are covered with trees, and form that region so dear to naturalists—Darenth Wood. Now to one unfamiliar with the district, who first traverses Darenth Wood, the trees are calculated to excite surprise, for every other is patched with a viscous, sweet, and dark substance, and he will stop and say, "What is the matter with these trees? Have they got some sort of disease with which I am unfamiliar?"

He will be answered, "Nothing of the

sort. This is done by the moth-hunters. Darenth Wood is famous for the rare lepidoptera caught in it, and it is for the Noctuina group that the collectors hunt here. They spread treacle and beer, mixed, on the trunks of the trees, and catch the moths that are attracted by the mixture. There are as many as three hundred British species of Noctuina alone. Then there are the Bombycidæ, which are not caught by treacle. The collectors hatch out a female and place her on a tree, when numerous males of the species gather about her. This method is not peculiar to the Bombycidæ, though I know of no sort that assembles so vigorously as that species ; it may, however, be satisfactorily tried with many of the Liparidæ and Chelonidæ, as well as with the *Endromis versicolora* and *Saturnia Pavonia minor*."

"Exactly. I merely asked about the smears, without wanting to plunge into lepidopterology. Of course this moth-catching takes place only in summer."

"Not at all. The *Eriogaster lacustris* appears in February, and the *Pœcilocampa populi* in November and December. Of course the majority of moths are found in warmer months."

At the edge of Darenth Wood stood, and perhaps stands still, a little house; it was inhabited by a forester, a man who trimmed and attended to the trees, thinning, pruning, planting. His name was Mullins; his wife was dead, but he had a daughter of the age of twenty—a remarkably handsome girl, with clear complexion, blue eyes, and singularly fair hair, that in the sun looked almost white; it was not quite silver, but of a yellowish tinge, an amalgam of gold and silver. She was tall and straight, had been spoiled by her father, and, knowing herself to be a beauty, was vain and coquettish.

If she had had only her father's little wage to dress on, she could not have adorned herself with such good clothes as those she affected; but Jessie Mullins had a subsid-

iary source of income—she herself collected and sold moths and butterflies, and she provided tea and supper for naturalists coming to Darenth Wood for lepidoptera.

The little room in which naturalists regaled themselves whilst waiting for the proper time to smear the trees was surrounded with cases in which butterflies and moths were displayed with spread wings. A whole case, containing many varieties of species, might be purchased, or else some of Jessie's small glass boxes, which she made herself, about a square or oblong block of wood, in which a single specimen or a pair of specimens was fastened by a delicate pin to a cork glued to the glass bottom.

Jessie furnished dealers with such specimens of British moths and butterflies as were to be caught in Darenth Wood, or on the downs, or in the chalk pits. Her skill in setting up specimens was great; her dainty fingers manipulated the delicate insects without bruising their wings or brushing off any of their plumage.

Perhaps it was her observation of the coloring of these beautiful insects that gave training to her eye and cultivated her taste. Certain it is that Jessie Mullins dressed becomingly. She never wore colors that disagreed with her complexion and hair. Her favorite tints were silver gray and pearl, and she wore a ribbon of pink or blue, but never much positive color. That caused all the naturalists who came to Darenth Wood to say, "Jessie Mullins dresses like a lady. To look at her you would swear she was a lady."

Now this century is especially the age in which natural history is prosecuted with ardor, not only by spectacled professors but by schoolboys and young men. My own son began collecting butterflies when he was six, and I have a baby that catches flies. Accordingly Jessie had a regular sale for her collections, and throughout a large part of the year had gatherings of naturalists, old, middle-aged and young, at her cottage, who desired to be provided

with lanterns, treacle and ale, and a supper when they returned from their chase in the wood.

Jessie was very much admired by the naturalists, and flattered by them; she made herself agreeable to them. Who could say but she might some day catch a naturalist on his way to catch a moth?

But, though the Bombycidæ are caught, the Bombycidæ catchers would not be caught. They were ready to joke with Jessie Mullins, flutter about her, keep up a simmering flirtation, but that was all. Jessie was too haughty to consider the pretensions of those of her own class. Those who ventured to approach were thrust off. For some time two or three of a genus above her own did buzz about her and were not absolutely repelled —they were tolerated; but they retired, all of their own accord. One there was, one man persistent, unabashed, whom no rebuff would banish, about whom more presently.

Tom Redway, the young plasterer, had been very much struck with Jessie. "Plas-

terer," sneered the girl, "what is a plasterer?" She sent him up an oak tree to catch Purple Emperors—gorgeous butterflies that fly high, and hover about the tops of the king of the British sylva.

So high do these splendid creatures fly that to catch them a ring net must be affixed to a pole forty feet long. But who can manage a net with the dexterity needed—that is, at the end of so long a pole?

Tom climbed an oak and brandished a pole with a net in vain throughout a day and caught nothing. Then Jessie laughed at him for his pains. He must be a fool not to know that the Purple Emperor loved home-made gooseberry wine, and might be enticed from his aerial altitudes by a bowl of that liquor. After this Tom was so joked by his comrades about being "sent up a tree" by Jessie Mullins that he kept away from Darenth Wood and the forester's daughter, and soon after—it was said out of spite—married a spinster ten years older than himself.

The next to hover round Jessie was Joseph Ruddle, the carpenter. She sent him in quest of the caterpillars of the rare Cinxia, that were to be found in webs about plantains half way down the side of the chalk cliffs.

Joe had fallen in his efforts to carry up a web of the caterpillars and had broken his leg. After that Joseph Ruddle went no more up the lane to the cottage of the forester.

Sam Underwood was another admirer. He was a young farmer. She encouraged him after a fashion. A match with him would not be a bad one at all. But Jessie trifled with him; she was like a player on musical glasses, who touches one, sets it humming, then another, and keeps a score in vibration at once. Sam did not appreciate this. He thought she carried on a little too much with a young Oxford man, son of Parkinson the brewer, and, in dudgeon, he withdrew.

There was a fourth, an owner of large

strawberry fields, from which he supplied the London market; a sleepy man who took long to make up his mind. She bewildered him with her learned talk about lepidoptera, and he became silent when he ought to have spoken, and no touches at last brought any quiver in his heart, or sound out of him.

There was a fifth, Mr. Parkinson, but Jessie was not sure that he was sincere; a vain and impudent young man.

And there was a sixth, who would not be shaken off, little Dicky Duck, an active, cheerful fellow with no fixed profession or trade, but always ready in any quarter to make himself useful. He was usually called in to assist the naturalists at night in the wood. He carried the lantern or painted the tree boles. He was not so tall as Jessie.

It was preposterous of him, a fellow stunted in his growth, to look up to her with matrimonial prospects in his absurd little head. Jessie snubbed him without

compunction. But he remained a faithful follower, and held on after Tom Redway, Joseph Ruddle, Sam Underwood, and Benjamin Polson, who owned the strawberry fields, had fallen away.

Everyone liked Dicky Duck; he was always cheerful, obliging, and good-natured; a wonderfully active little fellow, who darted about like a squirrel, and, as already said, was ready to turn his hand to anything. But, though everyone liked Dicky, everyone laughed at him: partly because he was small; partly because he never resented being made fun of, and so was a safe person on whom to whet the wit; partly also because his fresh, cheery face was laughter-provoking, it had a natural comicality about it. He was not bad-looking, there was no deformity about him, but there was an indefinable something about his face which set those who observed it alaughing. I had a pair of fire-screens once, on which were two heads with gaping mouths, and whoever took up one of these

screens was set a-yawning; so everyone who took up and talked to Dicky Duck was set a-laughing. He was not brilliant, he never said a witty thing in his life, and yet he was a good companion, because he excited risibility in those he was with.

The tall, dignified, handsome Jessie Mullins was ill-pleased that this absurd little whipper-snapper should be her persistent admirer; it offended her self-esteem.

As yet nothing has been said of the nickname given to Jessie. It was a nickname that could not fail to attach to her, partly from her business, partly from her appearance and color. She was called the Moth-Mullein, and it cannot be said that she disliked the nickname, for the Moth-Mullein is a stately plant, that stands up and shows itself off. She was not a modest retreating violet, not ordinary as a daisy, not fresh as a buttercup, not sweet as a rose; no, she was a Moth-Mullein, that stood by itself and held its head high.

CHAPTER II.

Two huge chalk quarries, worked by separate companies, had been opened many years before in the hill near Moth-Mullein's cottage, and these quarries had eaten their way towards each other till only a neck of chalk divided them. A line had been drawn from the cottage in the direction of Stone church-tower, that stood high on the hill to the west, and a concession had been made to one company on the north and to another on the south of this line. The companies had been wide apart at one time, but as years advanced they approximated, and now only a curtain of rock divided them, and neither might break through into the rights of the other. The ridge was called the "Back o' the Knife," and extended about two hundred feet where it was nar-

rowest, and there it was in places only about a foot wide at top. The soft rock was continually sliding away after thaws, and threatened in time to break the continuity of the Knife Back, and convert it into a saw. But that time had not yet come, and when the forester or his daughter wished to go to Dartford or Stone, the way taken was over the Knife Back, which saved a long round by the lane down to the high road, and thence by the road. In fact, it formed the hypothenuse of a triangle. The companies were trying to arrive at a compromise whereby they might get through this curtain, but each demanded too much of the other, and each thought by withdrawing it could make the other accede to its terms. So the Knife Back, though menaced, remained.

Over the Knife Back came Dicky Duck one day. Jessie saw him coming, and she said—

"You're not afraid of going along that way, it seems, but it is not a safe one."

"I'm not afraid. My light heart carries me over."

"I should have thought a heavy one would have steadied your feet best. What do you want here?"

"I have come to see your father."

"Oh! not me?"

"Of course you, Moth, but your father also."

"And what do you want with him?"

"I want him to speak a word for me to the Squire that I may be taken on as a woodsman. I know as much about trees as anyone. I've smeared their bark with treacle, and caught scores of moths off them. I ought to know trees."

"And what will you do when you are taken on in the woods, supposing my father does put in a word for you?"

"I'll marry you next day, Moth," said Dicky boldly.

"Will you? It takes two to do that. If that is to be the consequence, I will not ask my father to speak for you. You!

Why, you would have to stand on a chair to kiss me."

"I can do that without the help of a chair," said Dicky, and with a spring he was by her, had given a jump and caught her round the neck. In a moment he was sent spinning from her. She had given him a hearty box on his ears.

"Look what you have done, you ape!" she said.

She had been knitting a stocking; he had entangled his legs in the wool, pulled the stocking out of her hands, and unravelled a great part of her work.

"You come here full of impertinence," said she angrily, "and unravel what it has taken me an hour to knit. Go away at once over the Knife Back, and if you break your neck I'll not shed a tear."

Little Dick Duck looked sadly at her, and in spite of her annoyance she laughed —not good-naturedly, but in a manner to wound him.

He went back over the ridge.

"There!" said she, "he came hopping over with a light heart; I have sent him lagging back with a heavy one."

It is a curious feature in the character of woman that she finds a positive pleasure in making man miserable. As the weakest emperors and the feeblest governors are the most tyrannical and cruel, so is it with woman; because she is weak she likes to convince herself of possessing strength; she does this by treading on worms and making them writhe. She says to herself, "By nature it is true that I am feeble, but see how strong my beauty or my craft has made me! I can take that man and snap his heart as if it were a dry twig; I can bend and twist that other man about my finger as a piece of grass." It is not that woman delights in cruelty—far from it. She is full of sympathy and tenderness; but then, when she has power, she likes to exert it, and she can only convince herself that she is a queen when she hears the screams of her victims.

Jessie Mullins looked after Richard Duck as he walked the Knife Back, with a proud curl on her lip. She knew that he was unhappy, disappointed, and wounded, and she asked herself, "Could anyone else have clouded that gay countenance and brought a twitch of pain into the corners of that laughing mouth? That fellow's spirits are so high that there is no one—no one but me—who can sink him under water. I have put lead into that heart of cork, and he will keep down for a bit."

As Dicky Duck disappeared, from the Greenhythe road by the lane came the Oxford scholar with a case for specimens.

At once Jessie rose with a smile, and put aside the unravelled stocking. She folded it up and put it in a drawer, and met the visitor with a smile.

"How do yŏu do, Moth?" He held out both his hands.

"Come after moths?" she asked.

"Moth in the singular," he answered. "Who is he that says our British lepidop-

tera are deficient in beauty? Why here I have a Queen—the *Endromis versicolora*, the Kentish Glory—by the hand, by both, and am lost in admiration of her loveliness. Are you going to help me to catch moths in the wood this evening?"

"The Kentish Glory, sir, only flies by day."

"Then where is that little rascal, Dick? I must have assistance."

"I have just sent him over the Knife Back."

"I will run after him."

"Not for the world! You might fall and break your neck, and then I——" she hesitated, looked down and colored.

"Then you would—what?"

"Of course, Mr. Parkinson, I should be miserable,"

"Thank you for your sympathy." He put his hands one on each side of her face, with a sudden action drew it towards him, and kissed her.

"Halloo! halloo! what is the meaning

of this?" shouted old Mullins, coming up.

"Moth really provoked me to take a liberty," laughed the young man. "She was so troubled lest I should hurt myself if I went over the Knife Back, that in gratitude I could not restrain my emotion."

"I'll trouble you to keep your emotions of gratitude within proper bounds," said the woodman.

"Master Mullins," said the young man, I want some one to come with me this evening after moths. Dick is away; will you carry the lantern?"

"Can't," answered the father, "and what is more, you had better keep out of the wood to-night. The poachers—desperate fellows—are coming in a gang. They've had the impudence to send word to the head keepers to look out for them; there is a large gang of them going to drive the wood. Can't say this night for certain, but some night in the week. They were in Swanscombe Wood yesterday, and no one durst

stop them. There must have been ten or a dozen. We've been asked to help the keepers; we'll stop them if they come this way, and not give way as did them in Swanscombe. But they're desperate men, and there may be shots fired. So I say—keep out of the wood."

"Not at all," answered the Oxford man. "I'll go with you, and amuse myself looking out for moths whilst you are looking out for poachers."

"And I'll sit up," said Moth-Mullein; "I've got a beefsteak pie, and I'll have potatoes ready, and hot water for use when you both come back, that you may enjoy a good supper."

"Supper!" said her father, "it will be breakfast rather; we shall not be in till long over midnight."

CHAPTER III.

At the head-keeper's house were assembled all the under-keepers and those men who had been engaged to assist in watching the wood. A round of beef and ale had been provided for them. The party had regaled itself on the provisions, and waited to start for the wood.

"It's no use going too early," said the head-gamekeeper; "they won't come, if they come at all, for another hour."

"I say, Finch, do you think Long Jaques will be there?"

"Sure."

"Who is Long Jaques?" asked Mr. Parkinson.

"Long Jaques! Why, Long Jaques," answered one of the keepers; "everyone knows Long Jaques; there ain't a more

desperate blackguard in the county of Kent. I never will believe but it was he killed Tom Prentice."

"Sure of it!" said the head-keeper, Finch.

"The fellow is so daring and crafty there is not a cover he has not been in and got a pheasant out of, and yet has never been caught."

"I axed him t'other day," said a man, "whether he was working on the new line. 'New line,' said he, 'at ninepence an hour! Thank you! when I can get ten rabbits a day, and sell them at ninepence, and have the sport thrown in.'"

"If he'd stick to rabbits I wouldn't mind," said the head-keeper, Fred Finch.

"What brings you here?" asked Mr. Parkinson of Richard Duck.

"No offence, but I might ax the same of you, sir," answered the little man. "Lord, sir! I can run sharper than them that is bigger, and I see in the dark like a ferret."

"What are you doing there, Mr. Finch?"

now asked the Oxford University man. He saw that the head-keeper was melting lead in an iron pan over the fire.

"Going to run a bullet or two," answered the keeper; "not, please God, that I shall use 'em, but with Long Jaques and two or three of them other ruffians about, I like to have a bullet to fall back on. I'll tell you a story of Long Jaques. I can't swear it is true, but I believe it is. The story is told of him, but it never could be brought home. You know his wife died, leaving him a little child of a year, or perhaps a month under. Sometimes when he went out after his snares, he took the baby with him. He went out one Sunday when his housekeeper was not at home, and he had to mind the child; he went into the nearest wood, of course, to see after a pheasant. He had just got sight of one sitting in a tree, gone to roost, for it was evening——"

"But why did he not leave the child at home?"

"Because the child would not go to sleep,

so he took it out on his arm, and his gun in pieces in his pocket, on the chance of getting a shot. Sunday evening, he thought, no one would be about. He could not leave the babe alone in the cottage, and he could not keep at home when there was a chance of a pheasant. Now you understand?"

"Yes—go on."

"Well. He saw a big cock roosting in a tree. So he put down the babe on the grass at his feet, screwed his gun softly together, loaded it—not too heavy, and pop—down came the cock pheasant. He picked the bird up, and was just clapping it into his pocket, when he heard voices. Two keepers were coming that way. They had heard the report. Long Jaques went into the bushes, picked up the child, and whispered, "Poll, not a sound. Hush, and be still." Then he stood back where the leaves were thickest and listened. He heard the tread of the men hard by, and heard what they said. One was sure that the crack of the gun had

come from thereabouts. The other thought he smelt the powder. Then they saw where the grass was trampled, and one picked up some feathers of the bird. Long Jaques was mortal afraid the babe would squeal out, and let the keepers discover him. In his mind he darned his housekeeper for going to chapel that evening and leaving him with the child. He put his face down and whispered, and then drew his coat round the little creature. Then he heard her make a little noise and begin to struggle to get the arms out; but he drew his coat the tighter, and ever tighter, as the keepers kept prowling near. Curiously enough they did not see him, but it was some while before Jaques could loose his coat, and let the child out from under cover —not till their voices had died away in the distance. Then he saw the babe had gone to sleep—but it was to a sleep past waking —he'd suffocated her! So he took home a shot cock pheasant and a stifled hen babe —that came o' poaching on a Sunday."

"It was 'crowned, I suppose?" asked one man.

"To be sure, it was 'crowned and sat on, but the true story never came out at the inquest. That got wind afterwards. Long Jaques told it of himself, when he was drunk, and many a curse did he send after those two who had disturbed him that Sunday, and led to his smothering his child."

"And who were these two?"

"Mullins, there, and me. Now you know why I think it well to-night to have a bullet by me. Jaques is not particular, and like to deal tenderly by either of us, if he recognizes us."

"I say, keeper," interposed Mr. Parkinson, "as you are not using all that molten lead, let us have some of it."

"What for?"

"It is All-Hallow E'en," answered the young man. "In Scotland, whence I come, we make a great deal of to-night, and run lead into water, and find out what our for-

tunes will be for the ensuing year by the shapes the lead takes in water."

"That's all gammon," said Finch.

"Of course it is gammon, but as we have an hour to spend here before the moon rises, we can have some fun out of it. Let Dicky Duck try his fortune first."

The proposal created interest. A bowl of water was procured and set in the middle of the table, and an iron ladle or spoon heated, and dipped in the molten lead. The men, laughing, talking, chaffing each other, crowded round the table.

"Who shall try first? Dicky Duck?"

"No," said Mullins, "give it me."

He took the ladle, and poured the lead into the water. It fell fizzing, and sent up a puff of steam.

Then there ensued shouts of laughter, and guesses and queries. The lead was too hot to be extracted immediately.

"What is it? A tree, a house? A wife? A bag of money? A son-in-law? Eh, Mullins?"

James Mullins put his hand in and drew forth the lead. It had formed a compact, oblong mass.

"It looks to me uncommon like a coffin," said he. "Thank heaven, I lay no store by such things, or I'd not go out to-night and face Long Jaques."

"Now it is your turn, Dick."

The lead was again melted, and little Dick got on a chair, stood above the table, and let the fluid metal pour down from a height into the bowl. Again a burst of queries, guesses, and jokes.

The lead was extracted from the water; he had poured it into two masses, and two separate formations were in the water.

"What is this?" he asked, holding up the largest mass, which was shapeless.

"It looks to me like a dragon," laughed the head-keeper, Finch.

"And the other?" That was passed from hand to hand, and one conjecture after another was made concerning it.

"It is—a pair of hearts, a pair o' linked hearts," shouted one of the keepers.

"To be sure it is, but look," said Parkinson—"both broken!"

CHAPTER IV.

THAT night there was an affray with the poachers, an affray that was much talked of, and one about which the newspapers gave leaders.

Towards nightfall the keepers had been through Darenth Wood, and driven the pheasants towards the path, or road, that traversed the wood from Greenhythe to the village of Darenth on the further side of the hill. Their object in doing this was to get the pheasants to roost on trees beside the open road, where, in the event of the poachers coming after them, they could be most easily surrounded and caught. In the depths of the wood it might be hard to seize them, and it would be less easy to identify them; but if the fellows came along the road and popped at the birds in the

trees on each side, they would be perfectly visible to those in concealment watching for them, and it would be easy to cut off their retreat along the road by throwing a body of men across it. A good deal was made by some papers of this action of the keepers. It was represented that they had laid a trap and baited it for inoffensive men; the keepers provoked them to commit an illegal act, and then precipitated themselves upon them. On this text much indignation was expressed at the game laws; and the wealthy were held up to reprobation for reserving wild birds and beasts for their own table, and allowing the poor and deserving to starve whilst abundance was within their reach.

As it happened, the poachers belonged to a set—a set which lived on poaching, which moved about the country from place to place, and which supplied, or helped to supply, the London market with game. The men had no other business—they lived by poaching. They slept or loafed about

by day. Where navvies were engaged on a line they followed them, and brought these hardworking and generally honest men into disrepute. It was said that the navvies were desperate poachers. This was not so. The gang followed the navvies, and its components were men who never willingly did a bit of honest work—scorned the hard toil to which the navvy bowed his back. They lived by night sport, and let the navvies bear the blame of their misdeeds. Sometimes—so bold did these gangs become—they sent warning beforehand to the head-gamekeeper of my Lord or of Squire Acres, to say that they were going to visit his covers. Then the keepers had to consider whether they would muster a large force and go out against them, or keep close and let them do their worst. By no means infrequently the latter course was pursued. An affray with these rascals led to serious results. Shots were exchanged, blows dealt, and lives were lost. When the head-gamekeeper came to my

Lord or to Squire Acres and said, "I have had notice that the gang is coming. There are daring devils among them—Long Jaques for one, who smothered his child rather than be took," then my Lord or Squire Acres said, "Well, well, don't let there be a row and bloodshed. Go to bed, go to bed. They can't exterminate the game."

But in this instance the head-keeper was not willing to go to bed, and the Squire was inclined to have the poaching stopped. He had reared the pheasants, and he calculated that they had cost him a guinea a-piece. "I don't see," said he, "why I should let a man pick my pocket without trying to stop him," and he was right. If the landowners had combined, and altogether had said, "The gang must be put down," it would have been put down; but so many were timorous that the gang gathered courage, strength, and audacity.

This night—this All-Hallow E'en—there was an affray that created a sensation. It

created a sensation both because one man was shot dead in it, and also because the man who killed the other was caught and carried to jail, and that man was Long Jaques. He who was killed was Mullins the woodman, and he who revenged his death by catching the murderer was little Dicky Duck.

If the man shot had been a poacher, what an outcry would have been made !—what commiseration, what political capital would have been made out of his murder ! But as the man shot was only a fellow acting for the nonce as a keeper, there was not much fuss made about him. All the Radicals said, " Serve him right ! "

This is how it came about.

The poachers had come along the road, and had fired at three of the pheasants, when the gamekeepers and their party appeared and surrounded them. There were thirteen poachers, and all strong, desperate men. They turned to break their way through. The moon was shining. Long

Jaques was face to face with Mullins, and the moon was on Mullins' face.

Jaques uttered a curse. "It's you, you dog, who made me smother my kid!" he said; put his gun to his mouth and shot him dead. Then he made a leap to pass the man as he fell, and in another moment would have got into the coppice and have escaped, had not Dicky Duck been too alert for him. In an instant he was after him, gave a leap, was on the poacher's back, clung, and would not be shaken off. Jaques could not easily get at the adversary who was on his back, and who kicked him in the sides and fastened his grip with all his strength about the throat of the poacher, compressing the windpipe that he could not gasp. Jaques became bewildered, ran against the trees to beat off his little assailant, tried to wrench his hands away, but was unable. Duck clung like a ferret to a rat, and screamed for help, till Jaques, stumbling over a root, fell prostrate in the wood. Then the poacher would easily

have mastered Dicky, had not some of the keepers come to his assistance, rescued the plucky little man, and bound the poacher.

Moth-Mullein had the kettle on the fire puffing steam, and the potatoes on the boil. The table was spread, the cold beef-steak pie was on it, and her father's pewter tankard, brightly polished, reflected the firelight. Moth knew how to make a table look well. She had had experience. In the middle was a glass full of crisp, nutty celery; there was a piece of American cheese ready, and, balancing it, a plate of tartlets of her own making.

A little after midnight her father was brought home, dead. Finch came first to break the news to her. Mr. Parkinson followed with the body. Moth bore the shock better than might have been expected: she was deadly pale; but she was a girl of nerve and self-control, and she did not go into hysterics.

"I am very, very grieved," said Mr. Parkin-

son, looking out of the corners of his eyes at the beef-steak pie. "This is most dreadful. You have my deepest sympathy. Dicky Duck behaved like a man," then he left. The young man was quite out of his element in a house of sorrow and bereavement; he really was grieved, but he was at a loss to know what to say, and how to console the girl. "I must come after the funeral and see her," he said to himself; "what a bore that matters should have turned out like this! I must take care not to compromise myself. She is awfully pretty, but I'm not a fool."

Dicky Duck remained. He was of the greatest assistance to Jessie. He ran messages for her. He found an old woman to lay out the corpse and to keep her company. He contrived about the inquest, he saw the undertaker about the coffin, he arranged for the funeral. He would have ordered the mourning for Jessie had she suffered him. What would Jessie have done without the help of Dicky? She did not consider that it would have been inconvenient for her,

had he not been at her beck and call. She did not consider that he gave up his work and wage to attend her. She was grateful to him in a cold, ungracious manner only for having arrested her father's murderer. And the reason why her gratitude was ungracious was because Dicky had caught Long Jaques in such a grotesque manner, so that when anyone spoke of the capture a flicker of a smile passed over his face. At the inquest, when the evidence was taken, and it came to the account of the taking of the poacher, there was a general laugh, and the coroner and jury laughed with the public. It was not possible to avoid laughing,—the idea of little Dick clinging to the poacher's back, kicking him in the wind with his heels, and grabbing his throat with his hands was vastly ludicrous, especially when the little man was present with his comical face drawn in an effort to look sad.

Jessie was angry with Dick because he had not stopped her father's murderer in a

more heroic and dignified, or romantic, manner. The sense of his absurdity irritated her, and his very officiousness, though she accepted his services, helped to annoy her. She could not well do without his help, and she wished some one else—Mr. Parkinson for instance—had been there instead to minister to her wants.

Mr. Parkinson did not reappear till after the funeral. Then he called in a black coat with a hat, not his usual "billicock."

He seemed shy. In fact he did not know what to say. He was unaccustomed to paying visits of condolence.

"What are you going to do, if I may ask, Moth?"

"I shall have to leave this house," she answered, and sobbed. "It will go to the new woodman."

"Where are you likely to go to? Have you any nice relations?"

"I have no relations at all—that is, none whom I could stay with."

"But you have friends?"

"Friends"—hesitatingly—"yes, but I cannot go to them unless they ask me."

"I hope you are not left badly off?"

"Of course I must work for my living. I should like to live near this wood and go on collecting moths and butterflies, but that would not be enough to support me, I fear."

"And you have no one who can put in the claim of a near and dear tie?" Mr. Parkinson turned red. He was really sorry for the girl, and also much afraid of compromising himself. "I mean—I thought that Dicky Duck——".

"Sir—Mr. Parkinson!"

"I meant no offence. I have a suggestion to make. It occurred to me. It may have occurred to you. Why not go as one of the girls in a refreshment room at a railway station? It seems to me you are just the right sort of person for that, very good-looking, and like to chaff with young chaps, and don't mind a little cheek. You are cut out for it."

"Mr. Parkinson! is this all you have to say to me?"

"Yes, Moth. No offence meant. 'Pon my word I have been thinking a lot about you, and I do believe you were made for a refreshment room—and now the new line is being finished——"

Jessie rose, white with anger, and left the room.

Somewhat abashed, Mr. Parkinson came outside the house. Dicky was there.

"I say, Dick," said he, "the lead told true—a coffin for old father Mullins."

"Yes, but not so for me. I got a dragon, and St. George killed the last of them. And two hearts, but I've got only one on the right and none at all on the left."

"And both broken. No, Dicky, your heart is in the right place, and like mine, sound."

"I take it, that matter of the lead is all rubbish."

"Who can say! Wait till next Hallow E'en."

CHAPTER V.

THE road from the Forester's Cottage to Greenhythe Church happened, curiously enough, to lie between the grounds occupied by certain of Moth-Mullein's admirers. The farm of the Underwoods was at the corner where the lane joined the main road. The house was a substantial modern one, square, with a stack of chimneys in the middle, and the slated roof drawn together from all sides to the stack, without showing a gable anywhere. It was one of those houses in which people of no taste delight, because so compact, but which are eyesores to such as have a sense of beauty, houses which, even when ugliness-hating Nature reduces them to ruins, will never make even picturesque ruins. With the advance of civilization and cultured taste, and with

increased facilities for the employment of dynamite, all these abominations will disappear; the men of culture and light will go about the country and blow them up for the common good.

It was, however ugly, a snug house, and the farm was a good farm. As Jessie Mullins followed the hearse in which her father was conveyed to the churchyard, seated in a mourning cab, she looked over her white pocket-handkerchief at the Underwoods' farm, and saw that Sam was standing in the gate with his hat off, watching the mournful procession. Perhaps he would forgive her for having sent him away because she flirted with Mr. Parkinson—that is, if Mr. Parkinson did not offer her consolation. Further along the road was Joseph Ruddle's shop. Joseph was a carpenter, with a good business, a handy man, steady —never drunk. He had been thrown back by breaking his leg in going after the Cinxia caterpillars for her. Perhaps he would be on the look-out—yes, he was. Jessie over

her handkerchief saw him with his paper cap on his head, flattening his nose against the window of his workshop. Who could tell? Other things more unlikely might happen than that young Ruddle should offer her to share his home, and love her all the more dearly because she had broken his leg. He was a good-looking fellow; Jessie rather liked him. True he belonged to a lower stage on the social ladder than Sam Underwood, and Sam Underwood was a rung lower than Mr. Parkinson, who was a brewer's son. By the side of the main road, on the side opposite the carpenter's shop, were the strawberry-fields of Ben Polson. He was a heavy, stout fellow with a flat face, who walked about with his hands in his pockets; he, however, looked after his interests well, and in the time of strawberries was active, and drew his hands out. Well—if Mr. Parkinson did not propose to make her Mrs. Parkinson, she would have Sam Underwood, and if Sam Underwood still sulked, she would waive the difference

in social standing between the other two, and for the sake of his handsome face and general steadiness take Joe Ruddle. If, however, his broken leg made the carpenter halt in his love-making, she could always fall back on Ben Polson. Sure enough, there by the side of his hedge, with his hands in his pockets, was Ben, looking on at the funeral train, and—dolt that he was! —had forgotten to take off his hat, or thought, because he was on the other side of the hedge, that it was not necessary. That, in the time of her bereavement, she would not be overwhelmed with offers from these chivalrous young men did not occur to her. They had all admired her; it was true they had turned sulky, but then lovers' quarrels are proverbially short, and are, as the Eton Latin grammar says, 'the reintegration of love."

Jessie cried a great deal for her father. She had really loved him, and was genuinely grieved at his sad end. But to all bitters, by a merciful provision of nature,

there comes some sweet, and every cloud is given a silver lining; so Jessie thought that perhaps—nay, certainly—her great sorrow must lead to her advantage in the end. Some one or other of her lovers would —she did not put it in words, but she thought it—"come to the scratch."

As already shown in last chapter, Mr. Parkinson did not at all come to the scratch, or only came within a near risk of getting his face scratched because he proposed that Jessie should become waitress at a refreshment-stall, instead of becoming Mrs. Parkinson. Nor did Sam Underwood rise to the occasion. He still harbored his grudge. Nor did Joseph Ruddle; the lane was wet and rough, and he would not risk his leg on it. Nor did Ben Polson; he took time to think about it, and his hand was not available; it was in his pocket. So weeks passed, and Jessie was without a prospect of a fixed home. Little Dicky Duck had applied for the situation of woodman, vacated by old Mullins, and had got it.

"At Lady-day," said Dick, "I shall have this house. I don't want to turn you out, Moth; why should you not put your hand in mine, say the word—be my Duck and stay on?"

"Because I'm not come down so low as that woman who

"'Had a little husband
No taller than her thumb,
She set him in a pint-pot
And bid him drum.'"

"No offence meant, Moth; but as you have been accustomed to this house all your life——"

"I suppose I am tired of it, and wish for a change."

"Why, Moth? I get now the wages your father had, fourteen shillings a week; the cottage I shall have—and then——"

"Oh, if you are calculating on the cottage, I will turn out at Christmas. You need not wait till Lady-day. I'll have a sale, and the house shall be clear for you then."

"I wouldn't hasten you for the world, Moth. I don't want you to leave the house,

nor lose your sticks of furniture, but take me——"

"I wonder that you can have the face to make such a proposal, so soon after my father's death."

Moth-Mullein's temper did not improve that winter. She was subjected to slights, and was the victim of disappointment. She was constrained to leave her house, and she had not means of earning a livelihood. Partly because she would not be indebted to Dick, but also because she could not afford to be idle, she was led to the resolve to have a sale at Christmas, and to vacate the cottage. Though she made light to Dick of leaving, she was sore at heart. When she knew that go she must, the cottage all at once became dear to her, and the retrospect over her past life presented to her singular charms. She had been very happy on the edge of the wood, and very interested in her work collecting moths and butterflies.

She was vexed with herself, but would

not admit to herself that she had acted foolishly. She had trifled with her chances and had lost them. Neither Sam Underwood, nor Joseph Ruddle, no, nor Benjamin Polson showed tokens of relieving her from her difficulties by offering her the shelter of his name and roof.

Christmas Eve arrived; she had been down into Greenhythe to see the auctioneer. The sale was to take place two days after Christmas. It might not be on Christmas Day, and the day following was a Bank-holiday. Moth had also been about inquiring for lodgings, and had been unsuccessful. Greenhythe is a place which in certain seasons is very full of yachting men and their families. These guests are ready to pay a good price for lodgings, and those who have lodgings to let are indisposed to let them for a permanency at a low rent; they prefer a short and rich harvest in yachting time. Moth did not wish to leave the neighborhood, because she desired still to collect lepidoptera for her usual custom-

ers. The pay was not great, but it was something, and something certain. Besides, it was an occupation she liked.

The days closed in fast at Christmas, and, as it happened, that Christmas Eve was murky. The weather was rough, with a south-west wind, and heavy clouds discharging every now and then rain, and the darkness settled in earlier than Moth had anticipated.

The wind had shifted a little, a few points more to the north, whilst she was out, and after she left Greenhythe on her way home —to a dismantled and solitary home—the darkness fell like ink about her, and a storm of rain came on, so driving and so cold that Jessie took refuge from it in an old kiln that stood beside the road. The kiln-mouth was large, vaulted, and the shelter it afforded perfect. She retreated to the back part of it and seated herself on an overturned broken barrow, to wait till the storm had swept away and the sky was lighter.

As she sat there her utter disconsolateness made itself felt. She must vacate the cottage in three days, sell all her furniture, and be homeless. She had not settled whither to go. No friends had come forward to help her. Her pride had offended the young women who might have been her friends, and her want of consideration had alienated the men who might have offered her their homes. But it must not be supposed that Jessie blamed herself. She was bitter at heart against all the world. The fault was in her neighbors, her suitors, her acquaintance, not in herself.

Then, as she sat brooding, angry in soul, and with knit brows, she heard voices of men talking, and, a moment later, three persons entered the old kiln-mouth. As they talked she recognized them.

"I say, Underwood," said the voice of Ben Polson, "we shall do in here. What a slashing shower! It can't last long. I've just mulched my beds, and, darn it, this

flood will wash all the goodness away into the runnels, and carry it to the Thames. What I like is a soft drizzle—*that* carries the goodness into the ground and nourishes the roots."

"I'm glad to be out of the storm," said the third, and the voice was that of the carpenter. "Since I've broke my leg I get twinges of rheumatic in it."

"I guess it is just as well you broke your leg instead of your heart about Miss Moth-Mullein," said Underwood.

"Rather so," was the reply. "If I'd married her, she'd have broken my life, she's that giddy and cruel and self-willed. But, Sam Underwood, I thought you were after her?"

"So I was, but there were too many after her, and she kept our Oxford scholar skipping about her, and I didn't like that."

"And I was after her, too," said Polson slowly. "I say, mates, what larks! she's been trying to splice broken ties. She sent to say she'd be glad to earn a few

shillings by weaving strawberry pottles; but I wasn't to be taken in by that. I answered that I bought 'em wholesale, by the thousand."

There ensued a laugh.

"And she's been down every day to my farm for a ha'porth of milk, thinking that she might find me in the way some evening, and the ha'porth of milk would bring the cow and the stable and the house and the farm and Sam Underwood. I keep out of the way. I see through her little games."

"And she has ordered of me a couple of boxes for her clothes and them odds and ends as don't go into the sale," said Joseph Ruddle. "She thinks we're moths to be caught, she's such a dab hand at hunting; but we're wary coves—eh, Sam? eh, Ben? In vain is the net spread in sight of the bird."

"The rain is ceasing, I'm off," said Underwood.

"So be we," said the others.

CHAPTER VI.

WHEN the three men were gone, Moth put her head down on her knees and burst into tears, tears of shame and wrath. She had been unjustly treated. She had not hunted these three men; she had really needed milk, really needed boxes, really needed work. In her inner mind she had hoped that one or other of the three would come and throw himself at her feet, but she had not asked for milk, boxes, and pottle-plaiting in order to bring them there. She was very angry with all three; so angry, that had any one of them come back and offered himself to her she would have rejected him disdainfully.

She had been sobbing for some time, when again she heard steps, and again someone entered the kiln-mouth.

"Brrh!" said a voice, "I must shake myself like a dog. The wind is so high I cannot light a pipe out there, and I must dry my fingers before I can get at the lucifers."

The voice was that of Dicky Duck.

The girl shrank further back. She put one hand over her mouth, the other she pressed against her bosom, to check the sobs. She would not for the world be found there by Dicky Duck.

Then, whilst his fingers were drying, he began to whistle. Dick had a sweet pipe, and he whistled with taste and in tune. He whistled now "Home, sweet home!"

All at once a compressed, struggled-against sob broke from the heart of Jessie.

Dick stopped his whistling.

Another sob. Now the convulsive emotion had got beyond her control.

"There's someone there, someone crying!" exclaimed Dicky. "Who is it?"

No answer.

"Anyone unwell?"

No answer.

"Tell me who you are? I will not hurt you."

No answer.

Then Dicky stepped in as far as he could go in the dark, and fumbled for his match-box, and struck a lucifer.

The match flared up and filled the white vault with light. Dick stood with it in his fingers, motionless, looking with open, astonished eyes at the girl.

"Why," said he slowly, "it is Moth! Moth crying!"

He held the lucifer till the flame reached and burnt his finger, then he threw it away.

"Moth," said he, when they were again in darkness.

She did not answer him.

"Moth," said he again, with pity and tenderness in his voice. "I won't say nothing to you till you've got over them there hickups."

Presently she felt something on her face. He had removed the silk kerchief from

about his throat, and with it was gently wiping the tears from her cheeks.

"Lord," said he, "it have been raining, and has wetted you, awful."

Still she said nothing. Her sobs ceased at last.

"Now them hickups is over," said he, "suppose you stand up, Moth, and give me your arm, and—— Lord! Moth, never another word, there'll be no sale, you ain't going to leave the cottage. You unpack whatever you have put away, and we'll be married. Why, I put it to you. If you was to leave this part of the country, the moths and the caterpillars and the butterflies and the grubs of every description would multiply to that enormous extent, that the plagues of Egypt would be child's play to the state of Greenhythe. For the good of your native country and for the keeping down of warmint you must remain and become Mrs. Dicky Duck."

"Very well," said Jessie after a pause, "on one condition."

"And what is that?"

"That we have a grand wedding."

"We'll have the wedding as soon as the three banns have been called."

"Banns!" exclaimed Jessie. "You don't mean that we are to be married by banns? We must have a licence."

"That will cost a lot of money," said Dick, "and won't make us faster together than banns."

"It is grander," said the girl.

"There's one advantage in our being married and that so soon after your father's death, that it must be quiet."

"Did you not hear? I made it a condition we should be married in style."

"But why so, Moth, when we're humble folk, and after what has happened hardly proper?"

"Because, Richard, I want to show Sam Underwood, and Ben Polson, and Joseph Ruddle, aye, and Tom Redway, too, and Mr. Parkinson, who is here because it is his vacation, that we can do handsomely

without them. Then we can have a carriage——"

"A carriage, Moth!"

"To be sure, a carriage and white favors, and everything of the best."

"It will cost a lot of money. We needn't have a carriage. Think, Moth. It won't cost less than a pound."

"A carriage and pair," said Jessie. "I'll be taken to church in a carriage, and from church in a carriage, and in a carriage with a pair we will go on our honeymoon."

"I don't think we can go anywhere," said Dicky; "it will come expensive."

"We must go and do all in style, so as to let those fellows see that we have money to spend as well as they."

"But I have not the money, Moth."

"Then you must borrow it. A carriage and pair, and white favors, and a honeymoon I will have"—she stamped impatiently. "Do you think I want *you*? I want a stylish wedding, and I take you for the

sake of the wedding, and to make these men open their eyes."

Moth Mullein carried her point. She was poor, she had nothing but her father's furniture, and Dicky was poor, except in prospect of a good wage for tending to the woods. He had no money laid by, but Jessie would listen to no excuses. To satisfy her Dick had to borrow money, to borrow the carriage and horses of the host of the "Blue Boar," with promise to pay when he could. When the wedding took place Jessie drove to church, and drove slowly in state past the farm of Sam Underwood, the shop of Joseph Ruddle, the strawberry field of Ben Polson, and the plasterer's yard of Tom Redway; yes, and past Mr. Parkinson too, who stood on the kerb of his door and threw rice after her.

"Now," said Jessie, with flashing eye, "now do you understand, Dick, why I insisted on a grand wedding?"

"No, I do not, Moth."

"Because I wouldn't have them say I

took up with you because I could get no other; because, also, if we didn't do it in style they might have laughed at such a handsome, tall girl as I am taking such a cock-sparrow as you. But they can't laugh when they see us drive away as gentlefolks in a carriage and pair."

"It'll cost a lot of money," sighed Dick.

"There is one thing more," said Jessie as she laid aside her bonnet and fumbled in her pocket. "Do you remember unravelling a stocking I was knitting one day?"

"I cannot say I do remember."

"But *I* do. Here it is!" She held it under his eyes—in his face. "Now I'll take care that you are paid out for unravelling that stocking."

CHAPTER VII.

A YEAR had passed since the woodman had been shot. Dicky Duck was in the cottage; Jessie had not made his life more cheerful. The mouth that was formerly puckered with smiles was now drawn and compressed. It really looked as though Dicky were on the edge of a cry rather than on the brim of a laugh.

There is a child's toy that represents a number of feathery birds on a platform on wheels. When the little thing is thrust or drawn along, a quill is set in motion that strikes fine wires and catgut. The little birds are on the quiver, and then ensues a twittering and chirping as though they were all singing. Dicky's heart had been like this hitherto; anyone could set it in

motion, and produce a twittering and chirping that provoked laughter. But the strings and wires must have been broken or relaxed, or the quill tongue out of order, for now, either no merry sound at all issued from him, or only a plaintive little tweet! tweet! such as a shivering finch gives forth when hail and frost have stripped the trees and made the face of the land desolate. The spring had gone out of the little man's walk, the straightness from his back, the sparkle from his eye, the whistle from his lips.

Poor little Dicky Duck! What had altered him? Not the getting of regular employ with the weight of responsibility for the young trees. There was nothing else to account for it but his marriage. Jessie made no attempt to curb her tongue. She cast jibes at him, scorned him for his smallness of stature, turned contrary when he was merry, distorted his funny little sayings and gave them an ill-natured turn, as though they were thrusts aimed at her, when

nothing was further from his thoughts than to break a lance with his wife. His light-heartedness was made a cause of reproof; his amiability was treated as callousness. Every day some scornful allusion was made to the ridiculous manner in which he had caught Long Jaques, and Dicky heartily wished he had let Long Jaques escape.

Moth was a disappointed woman, and her disappointment had soured her. Did she love Dicky? Who can say? Love expresses itself in various ways. Love in some is tender, considerate, pitiful. In others it is exacting and cruel. Yes, there is a fashion of love that is ashamed to own itself, but wraps itself up in hardness and defiance. There is a story of a princess who was clothed in gold, but over the gold brocade she drew a vesture of horsehair and hog's skin. Everyone thought she was a wild woman, and those who came near her were scratched; but one day, through a rift in the coarse outer covering, the gleam of the gold shot, and then it was seen that

she was a princess in disguise. Was there an under-vesture of cloth of gold, the fine gold of true love, in Jessie? If so she covered it up and hid it, chief of all from her husband, lest he should surmise its existence.

"It is a year to-night since your father died," said Dick, "and just about eight months since we were married."

"Ah! I have cause to know that; afflictions never come singly. First I lost my father, then I got you."

"I've a mind to stay at home to-night, and not leave you to your sorrowful thoughts, Moth."

"I do not want you. Go again if you like to the 'Blue Boar.' You seem to be most at home there."

"Well," said Dicky, "I can't say that, exactly, but you see I meet them old friends, and they ain't sharp on me, but uncommon kind. And then, Moth, I haven't yet paid for the carriage and pair, and I must keep the landlord in good humor, lest he press for

payment. That carriage and pair do weigh on me like lead."

But he hesitated whether to go or not. He waited for a word from her to make him stay.

"Moth," said he, "I shall go round by Greenhythe. I must fetch a bundle of tarred cord for the trees."

He would have given a year of his life—a leap-year, even, which has a day extra—for a good word from her, but none came. Then he went away, with a heavy tread. She heard his steps; how they dragged! —there was no elasticity in them now.

After he was gone, it suddenly occurred to her that since the rain of the preceeding night a portion of the Knife Back had given way. It would be dangerous to cross it in the dark. Would Dicky venture on this when he returned from the "Blue Boar"? In her sullen mood she muttered, "If he does it will serve him right for going away from me—on such a night as this." But she did not mean what she

said, not in the depths of her heart; and because she did not mean it, without staying to cover her head, she ran out of the the cottage after him, down the lane, to give the caution. She had delayed too long before starting in pursuit, for he was not in the lane. She came out on the road, and almost ran among some men who stood there in a cluster. Their heads were turned in an opposite direction, and they did not observe her; but she recognized them, and to escape being seen slipped into the mouth of the old kiln. She did not wish to be caught running after her husband, and running after him with nothing over her head.

The men were Mr. Parkinson, Sam Underwood, Joseph Ruddle, and Ben Polson.

Dusk had fallen, and in the kiln-mouth all was dark. Jessie heard the voices approach it, and as once before, so now she drew back into the depths.

"I say," said Mr. Parkinson, "it is warmer here out of the east wind. Are any of you going to the 'Blue Boar' to-

night? There's Dicky Duck trotting off there, not knowing what is in store for him."

"What is in store for him?" asked the carpenter.

"Don't you know, Ruddle? Well, I dare say you do not. It has been kept quiet that the surprise may be complete. Some of us who were with him this day last year, when he took that scoundrel Jaques, also the Squire and some others, have clubbed together to make him a testimonial —a beautiful clock, with a silver plate let in on the stand, engraved with a few lines, to show it is a mark of esteem for his pluck and readiness. He has been told to come to the 'Blue Boar' to-night, but has no notion that the Squire will be there to present him with the testimonial, and that he'll be the lion of the evening. I am going."

"I fancy something ought to accompany the clock," said Underwood. "The poor little chap is under water with the extravagance of that fool of a wife of his, who

would have a grand wedding, with a carriage and pair, I've heard the host of the 'Boar' say that was never paid for, and he believes the reason why Dick is so downhearted now is because he is in debt."

"I think we're all of one mind," said Ben Polson, "that we owe him something—we who've not been asked to subscribe to a testimonial of which nobody told us anything. First, because we all respect the little man; though small in body he is big in heart. Second, because he tackled what was worse than Long Jaques—the Dragon of Darenth."

"The Dragon of Darenth has been too much for him," said the carpenter. "It is my opinion that it is because of *her* he is so altered in looks and spirits, not because he is in debt. Lord! we had a lucky escape, all of us."

"I say, mates," spoke Sam Underwood, "shall we send the cap round here in the kiln to raise a little sum among us to pay for the coach and pair and the white

favors? Mr. Parkinson has already subscribed to the testimonial."

"But my thankfulness at my escape from the Dragon is not exhausted. I insist on adding my mite. Take my hat and pass it round."

Jessie heard the clink of coin. Her face was on fire. She nearly choked with anger. Her heart beat so furiously that it was a wonder it did not reveal her presence.

"I must tell you a joke," said Mr. Parkinson. "On this night, a twelvemonth ago, Dick and I, old James Mullins, and the keepers were in Mr. Finch's waiting to go after the poachers, and some took to running lead to find out their fortunes. What do you think Mullins ran?"

"I've heard," said Underwood, "a coffin."

"And that is what he got. Dick ran the lead next, and he ran—a Dragon!"

There followed a burst of laughter, and a general exclamation of "And that he has got."

"There was something more he ran in lead," continued the Oxford man. "He ran two broken hearts in lead—linked together."

"One broken heart is accounted for already," said Underwood. "His wife has pretty nigh broke his—but the other!"

"The other can't be hers," said the carpenter. "For why? He is that gentle and considerate he would not say a word or do a thing to hurt her."

"For why?" put in Ben of the strawberries. "Her heart is too hard ever to be broke."

This elicited another burst of merriment.

Then the men went forth.

Jessie, angered, ashamed, with burning head and bounding heart, rushed out and ran up the lane to her cottage, and threw herself on her bed, with her hands over her eyes, tossing, muttering, then at length with the tears of mortification streaming between her fingers. She was no longer the Moth-Mullein, but the Dragon of

Darenth. Her husband was in high esteem, and she—she was despised and disliked. What had her grand wedding, with carriage and pair, brought her? Ridicule; and the cost of the luxury was defrayed by her slighted suitors.

CHAPTER VIII.

NEVER—no, never, was a man more taken aback, more utterly amazed, than was Dicky Duck when he found himself an honored guest at the "Blue Boar," where a supper was spread, and the Squire himself was present to hand over to him, in behalf of some of those who valued his excellent character and esteemed his courage, a Testimonial of Respect and Regard.

What for?

For his daring conduct on the night of the murder of old Jim Mullins.

Dicky looked from side to side, opened his mouth, but never a word came from it. He turned white with astonishment and emotion. *He* given a testimonial for *that*? Why, that was an act thrown daily in his

teeth at home, a subject of daily humiliation. Heartily ashamed of himself had Dicky Duck become, because he had jumped on the poacher's back, kicked him in the wind, and behaved altogether ridiculously. Whenever he had heard an allusion to that affair, in the tavern, or among his acquaintances, he had winced. He supposed that others viewed his conduct in the same light as did Moth, his wife. If it had not been for her—that he was tied to her, and bound to look after her, to support her, and make her happy—he would have run away to America where he might be out of hearing any more of the capture of Long Jaques in Darenth Wood.

Dicky looked at the Squire, then at Mr. Parkinson, who sat at the Squire's right hand, then at Finch, the head-keeper, who sat on the Squire's left; then at a fly that sat on the ceiling immediately over the Squire's head; and then with an expression of distress at the host of the inn, who stood behind the Squire, and was making a trum-

pet of his hands, and sounding a hoarse stage-whisper through it, of "Say something."

Dicky knew he must say something, but every object spun round with him, and the Adam's apple in his throat went up and down like the knob of a piston in a steamer and choked him. But at length he became sufficiently composed to gasp "Thank-y, gentlemen"—he touched his forelock—"I can't underconstumble it noways, a little chap like me—no higher than her thumb, as was ordained to be put in a pint-pot and forced to drum; as made himself a laughing stock and mockery, and made a fool of himself—but I fancy, gentlemen, you're now poking fun at me?"

"No, no, no! Go on, Dicky; bravo!"

"It can't be for me"—again he touched his forelock—"more of a monkey than a man—who can't do anything but he must do it absurdly; who——"

There welled up in his memory the many harsh, cutting, cruel things that his wife

had said, and which he had accepted from her lips as his due.

"Gentlemen," said he, "I'm that amazed I ax you of your great kindness to let me run home and take this here clock with the beautiful silver plate and inscription, and show it to my missus. And——" he saw the host thrusting a paper into his hand; he looked at it. The host was not perfect in his orthography, but Dicky understood what was written:—

"For a Carridge and Pear, etceterer,
"Sottled."

"Gentlemen," he looked at the paper, "I'm that upset I shall be unwell unless I run home, and show 'em to Moth-Mullein —show her the beautiful clock and the silver plate, and last, not least, 'For a Carridge and Pear, Sottled.'"

His voice was quivering, his eyes filling.

"Yes, let him go," said the Squire. "He is right. He must go to his wife. He will

break down if we detain him, and that may hurt his pride."

"Then, Dicky," called Mr. Parkinson, "not by the Knife Back."

"Lord, sir! It saves over a mile, and I could cross it the darkest night at a run."

He went forth—went with the clock hugged to his breast, and holding the receipt in his right hand. He had but one idea then—his mind could hold but one. He must tell his triumph to her who had despised him. His heart made a great leap —towards her. Now, now at last, she would come to see he was not the despicable little monkey she supposed, and now, now at last, as she would respect him, would come to love him.

Jessie had lain long tossing and weeping on her bed. She had beaten her head with her clenched fists, and then struck her head against the wall and the posts of the bed. She would have liked to kill those insolent, mocking men! How dare they make game of her as she had made game of Dick? She

lay for a while staring up at the ceiling out of hot eyes, biting her fingers, and then again threw herself over on her face in a fresh paroxysm of tears.

Why was Dick away now? Now—when she was insulted, wounded, in pain? Dick! he was amusing himself at the "Blue Boar," laughing, telling his silly stories, cracking his inane jokes, making everyone laugh at him and pity her for having for her husband such a jackanapes. But, no! She gave a gulp. No, Richard was there respected. The Squire had gone there on purpose to meet and honor him with a testimonial. No, Dick was not the laughing-stock she had supposed. Her eyes had been blind to his merits, to his courage, his gentleness, his patience, his tenacity of purpose. But she could not forgive him for being absent now, when she was so unhappy —now, on the anniversary of her father's death.

As these thoughts dark and wild chased through her head, as clouds across a stormy

night sky, still crying she dozed off into troubled slumber.

How long she slept she did not know, whether for seconds or for hours. She awoke with a start. There came to her suddenly, in the midst of her sleep, a thought that seemed to strike her sensibly, not as a stunning, but as a rousing blow; and the thought was—the Knife Back has been broken through, and Dick does not know it. He may return that way. Dick! Was it a cry she heard? With a shiver, and her hair standing electrified, and audibly rustling about her head, she stood on her feet. Had she heard a cry, or had she dreamt it? With trembling hands she struck a match and lighted a lantern, ran out before her house, and listened. She trembled so that her teeth chattered in her jaws. Had she heard a cry, or had she dreamt it? Should she run to the "Blue Boar" and caution Dick? or should she stand on the broken edge of the Knife Back and call? She would do the latter first.

She stole to the brink of the old quarry and along the ridge as far as it went. Then came a gap ; the rain and frost had undermined this portion of the path, and it had given way the preceding night.

"Dick!" she called, "Dick! Dick, dear!"

Then from far below she heard a faint "Ting! ting! ting! ting!" a clock that struck—what hour she could not tell, she did not count ; but immediately after a Dartford clock struck far away, and nearer, but still distant, the Greenhythe clock tolled ten.

What was that she had heard ? No echo ; it came before the town clocks had struck.

There was, a little way off, a steep path —almost a slide—down the cliff of chalk. She went to the place, and descended cautiously. Her heart was sick with fear.

She reached the bottom, and there she stole along with her lantern near the ground before her, fearing greatly what she might see irradiated by the yellow light.

Her heart stood still, and every drop of blood was arrested in her arteries. Within the circle of light was a foot in boot with brass eyelet holes for the laces. She knew the boot ; it belonged to Dick. She uttered a cry and raised the lantern, and it threw its halo over the little man, lying huddled among the chalk lumps, hugging something.

She stooped, she touched, she called, she kissed him. He took no notice. His eyes were closed, but his lips slightly moved, and one hand that clutched a piece of paper was lifted, and the paper thrust in her face, much as once she had thrust the unravelled stocking in his. But she did not look at the paper.

What should she do ? She was a woman of nerve and strength in emergency. Should she leave him there, and run for assistance ? She could not ; no, she would not do that. He was a little man, and she a strong, tall girl. She bent to him, put her arms under his body, and lifted and carried him away.

She carried him through the old quarry.

She paused at intervals and panted. Then she went on again. She came out into the road. She must go some way round to reach her cottage, must pass Ben Polson's strawberry field, and Joseph Ruddle's shop, and Sam Underwood's farmhouse. Should she halt at any of these and ask for help? She set her teeth; she toiled on. She had left the lantern in the quarry; she could not carry that as well as her husband. No, she would seek no help. No! along that road she had driven in the carriage and pair which had so troubled Dick because he could not pay for it—the carriage and pair for which the hat had been sent round. No, no, no! She would carry him all the way. He could not be better than in her arms; she would traverse, bearing him, every step of that road over which she had driven scorning him in her heart.

The night was dark. No one was in the road, no one in the lane when she reached that. She halted at the kiln, and as she was exhausted, carried her burden within,

and sat on the ground with him lying across her knees.

She had matches with her. She struck one, and it flared up. His eyes were open now. She saw that he was looking at her, and again he thrust the paper that he clutched towards her, and a smile broke on his face.

"Dick! O dear, dear Dick! Speak to me! Forgive me! O Dick, speak, speak!"

Then he said, "Moth!—A carridge and pear, etceterer—sottled," closed his eyes, and the lucifer went out.

He had held tightly to him all this while the presentation clock; it was a clock that would go in any position, and it had gone in spite of the fall. As Jessie carried the little man, she had felt or heard the tick, tick, tick against her own heart, and had thought at first it was the counter-beat of his. Now, in the darkness, as the lucifer expired, the clock stopped, stopped as the light went out, stopped as he said "Sottled."

In the stillness, in the vault of the kiln-mouth, she listened for his breath, but could not hear it. She stooped to his heart, laid her ear against it, and heard nothing. That piece of mechanism was stopped also. She unloosed, in the dark, his red neckerchief, the kerchief with which he had dried her tears in that same kiln-mouth, when in his kindly considerate way he had called her sobs "hickups." She sobbed now, and none tried to stay her sobs. She wept now, and no hand was extended to wipe away her tears.

CHAPTER IX.

At the refreshment stall of the junction to the new line, some time after what has been related, might be seen a young woman in black with wonderfully light hair, so light as to be nearly if not quite silver, a young woman with a beautifully delicate, pure complexion; one with an expression of sadness on her face, but with that sadness tinged with a certain sweetness, the sweetness of humility and modesty. The guards, and the young men who came to the bar, never ventured on any familiarity with her, but always treated her with deference, and addressed her as "Mrs. Duck." A year passed, and then one day between trains, when the girls were away, and only Moth was there, Sam Underwood came into the refreshment room. He looked round, saw that no one was within earshot, leaned across the coun-

ter, and said, "Moth!—I mean Mrs. Duck—what do you say? Will you take me now? I'm well off; and we'll have a splendid wedding and a carriage and pair."

She shook her head.

"My first carriage and pair is not yet paid for."

"Indeed I know it is."

"Yes, the host of the 'Blue Boar' is satisfied. But I still owe it to Dick."

No, she would not have Sam Underwood. No, nor Joseph Ruddle, when he asked. No, nor Ben Polson, when he came for the same purpose. And when Mr. Parkinson hung about the bar and asked for a glass of bitter, or a nip of cherry brandy, and looked tender things, did she encourage him to make any further advance? No, not by a sign.

On All-Hallow E'en the old head-keeper, Finch, came to look in on her at her lodging.

"Mrs. Duck," he said, "now I understand it. That lead-running was not all gammon.

The second heart after all was broke—that is, all its pride and hardness gave way. The shell was broke."

She liked to talk to Finch as to a father; he had known her from a child. She told him how troubled poor Dick had been because he had incurred debts—especially about the wedding conveyance—through her pride; and how she thought about the wrong she had done him, and grieved over it.

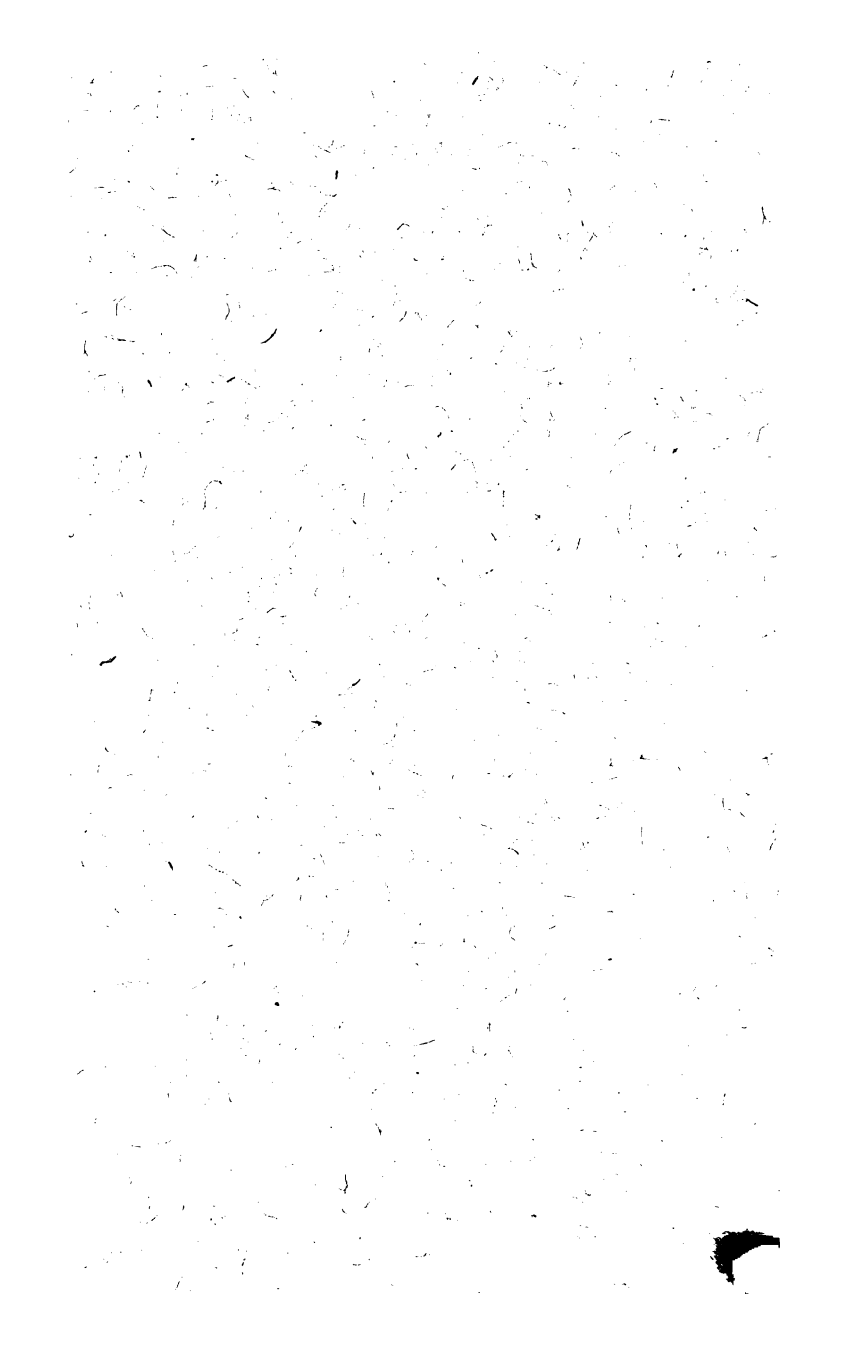
"Mrs. Duck—Moth," said he; "Dick was the gentlest and most forgiving creature there ever was; what was that paper he thrust on you as he died?

"'A Carridge and Pear, etceterer,
Sottled?'

What is 'Etceterer'? Everything between you scored off—sottled. He bore no grudges—not Dick!—sottled!"

THE END.

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